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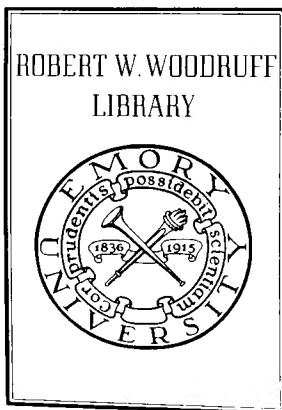
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# THE O.V.H.

OR,

HOW MR. BLAKE BECAME AN M.F.H.

By WAT. BRADWOOD.

AUTHOR OF "ENSEMBLE."

NEW EDITION.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

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# THE O. V. H.

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## CHAPTER I.

### IN MEDIAS RES.

**M**R. JAMES BLAKE moodily picked his way through the pink flakes of a Llanberis trout. "Letters, Sir," said the waiter of the period, as he deposited a tray full of documents on the breakfast-table.

Mr. Blake was rather precise in money-matters. There were no such things as bills unpaid, or "to bills delivered," to swell his correspondence at so late a date from quarter-day as the 5th of August. He carefully scanned the outside of two or three dubious-looking circulars that bore claims of extra postage for their peregrinations in search of him. Two he selected and condemned unopened.

"You may take these back to the post-office, and pay

no postage for them, waiter," said he, as he recognised the handwriting, — a seedsman's circular soliciting the patronage of a champion swede,—and divined the contents of the touting pamphlet of an importunate wine-company that was eager for his custom.

Then to business.

From the remaining enclosures he selected as the basis of operations an envelope addressed to himself at the Victoria Hotel, Llanberis, in that transition style of fist that marks the schoolboy's hand at an age when he has begun to shake off the malformations engendered by the impositions of lower-school days.

The pith of a boy's as of a woman's letter is sure to lie in the finale, or postscript :

"I shall be at Carnarvon 3.30, and will drive straight over. Leave word where you are gone to.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"C. R. BLAKE.

"P.S. Old Monsell died of apoplexy yesterday ; we heard it this morning. I really am sorry, though he was so rude about that rioting puppy of his at Englefield Gorse. Here's a chance for you, old boy—someone is sure to be wanted to take his hounds ; and if you really think of standing for the east division, it will help to get you better known in the place than anything else. Cub-hunting will begin in another three weeks, and they are sure to have a meeting of the Hunt as soon as the funeral is cleared off. We'll talk about it to-morrow.

"C. R. B."

"What will the boy want next?" grunted Mr. James Blake, as he proceeded to unravel and decipher a draft for mining-shares, an application from his agent for lease of a house on the New Steyne, Brighton, a begging-letter, and a summons to a committee-meeting of the Windham.

Mr. Blake—"Jemmy Blake," as he was denominated by his friends, and even most casual acquaintances all the world over—was rather abstracted as he lay on the grass and lighted his morning havannah, to facilitate his study of the *Field* and other sporting-papers that had reached him by that Monday's post.

His young cousin cannot possibly arrive much before 3 P.M. Meantime, some more definite introduction of each will not be out of place.

A man's name and its adaptations go far to define his real character and external appearances. Jemmy Blake was like a majority of other Jemmies—middle height, five feet nine inches, middle aged (a relative term—children called him a nice middle-aged man; elderly folk styled him a well-behaved young man). He had completed his thirtieth year; he had full and sandy mutton-chop whiskers, and brown frizzly hair; no particular characteristic beauty of physiognomy, but a broad expression of grim good-humour, that would forbid any but a rival or enemy to call him a plain man. Easy-going good temper was stamped, too, plainly in his face—not that he was by any means a fool, far from it, especially in money-matters; but he was that sort of man who would never pick a quarrel if he could help it—not only from dislike to the existence of personal enmity, but



literally from sheer indolence, which made him grudge the trouble of bearing malice to anyone.

He had obtained a berth in the *Monarch* during his last summer at Eton, done two years' hard duty in his college torpid, and at last gained promotion to a place in the bows of the eight, a creditable third upon the *Isis*. He went to chapel, if not regularly, at least with sufficient decency to save any collision with the dean; rode some three days a-week fairly straight to hounds, in an unostentatious black coat; took his hand at whist or loo when required; never dunned an acquaintance for a debt if "forgotten;" gave in his turn social and unexceptional "wines," and never was guilty of offering to any of his friends a bottle from an Oxford wine-merchant. He never was seen drunk; had no ambition for "honours;" but had only one second paper in schools, and invariably secured his *testamur*; and without having left any name in class, cricket, or boating lists as a landmark to posterity, was regretted by all contemporaries when he put on his gown as a thoroughly easy-going and unselfish man.

Jemmy Blake was not a man of large property, but he was decidedly comfortably off. He owned a street and four or five farms in the neighbourhood of Orleton, some houses at Brighton, of which the leases had lately fallen in, and a round sum in stocks and securities. He kept his chambers in St. James's, rented hunting-quarters in various localities from year to year, had no settled home of his own, and was unobtrusively welcome everywhere, and nowhere more so than at the house of his aunt, Lady Mary Blake. His pocket-money would be under-esti-

mated at six thousand per annum, and it is needless to add that he was still in single blessedness.

His father and the husband of Lady Mary had been brothers. Cut off, the one by Indian climate, the other at the Redan, each had left an only son, who had grown up more like elder and younger brothers than even first-cousins.

Jemmy had lost his mother even earlier than his father, and when released from the guardianship of Chancery was in every way an unencumbered man.

Lady Mary Blake was sole mistress of the house and small property which Colonel Blake had left to her—his moiety of his father's estate in and about Orleton. The property had formerly no house attached to it, and the "Maule"—originally the "Maule Farm," though the latter term had been dropped for euphony when the transmogrification took place—was a snug and fairly-sized mansion added on to the more habitable portions of a quaint farm-house that had principally been used as a shooting-box by the colonel, but which was now altered to a more elegant residence by his relict in preference to her jointure-house in Wilton-place, S.W.

She was a good, simple-minded, simple-hearted soul, Lady Mary; few faults could her enemies have picked in her as a wife, fewer still as a widow; as the former she had two idols, husband and son, to abstract her worship; as the latter, only one, and in him was concentrated ten-fold all the sterling treasure of a mother's love.

Fond she was without being altogether foolish; she had wits enough to see his faults as well as his good points, of which latter he had many; but she had still

further wits sufficient to teach her to endeavour to let the wisdom of experience and tacit yet gentle influence work cure for the future, without risking petulance or impatience by restraint, or trying to make her idol a mere automaton tied to her apron-string.

Few lads had more liberty and license than Ruby Blake—Charles Rubens Blake, but known as “Ruby” exclusively since his nursery-days, in home, village, school, county, everywhere. Few suffered less and gained more by free agency, or were more trustworthy, from the fact that the existence of truth and trust were never for an instant called in question.

Jemmy Blake and Ralph Romilly (of whom more anon) used teasingly to say that it was a pity that Ruby was not born a girl. So far as external appearances and many points of his disposition were concerned, Nature might have made a mistake when she modelled him slight, lathy, regular-featured, child-faced, rosy, and golden-haired. Yet those who had known him unflinchingly bear his share as bow of the Eton eight in a neck-and-neck struggle from Henley Island for the Ladies' Plate, or had seen his slight physique and lathy stride in the previous spring wear down the whole field for the school steeplechase, as in the last half-mile the holding plough and severity of pace told successively upon the “favourite,” till none of that muddy and tattered train were within thirty yards of him at the Brocas “run in,”—would own that the girlish face and physique concealed a man's heart and thoroughbred pluck, only skin-deep, under those false colours.

All out-door game was sport to Ruby. Better mounted

by an idolising mother than most lads of his age, his light weight could show a good pair of heels to the best of the field, especially when rains had been heavy, enclosures were large, and hounds running hard upon grass.

He was now coming down for a couple of days' small-fry Welsh-trout fishing with his quasi uncle or brother, Jemmy Blake, and to proceed in quest of salmon in the Tay till the Orleton partridges were ready for destruction, but fully determined in his own mind to bully his indolent relative into taking up practically the mastership of the Old Vale hounds, the neighbouring pack to the Orleton Hunt, and blessed with a superior grass country; in whose company, located at the Crown and Sceptre, Creswick, Jemmy had spent most of the previous hunting-season, alternating, on non-hunting days, between his public and the Maule, and accompanied, at least once a week, by Ruby, who was glad enough to exchange the sticky ploughs of Orleton for the stiff-bound blackthorn fences of the Old Vale, whenever school and home-ties were complaisant to liberate him.

On one school-holiday he had actually the audacity to obtain a fictitious leave for dinner with an accommodating incumbent, who allowed him to take his name in vain, and to slip by the G. W. R. in time for second horses and second fox at a meet not more than a hundred miles away. But trains for return were not so accommodating as for exit. His absence was detected; and Ruby, having been "swished" with due orthodoxy, did not risk a further rupture with the authorities by any other such experiments.

But the grassy slopes and flying fences of the Old Vale



had stung his ambition and put him out of conceit with the agricultural aspect of the Orleton country. No wonder that he rose so readily to the chance that seemed to offer itself of definitely domesticating his accommodating relative in the country he courted, and moreover in a position whence, as general manager of a large stud, he would be better able to supply "mounts" when a spare day could be snatched; and which would no doubt, if accepted, induce him to settle down, at least for the season, in some rentable country-house instead of gadding about, coming and going from pothouse to public, according to the convenience of meets, as was too much the tendency of Jemmy Blake in the late hunting-season.





## CHAPTER II.

### MR. BLAKE DISCOVERS AN ERROR.

**W**E have said that Mr. James Blake was a bachelor. His very tone and looks forbade the idea that he was trammelled by any such encumbrance as a wife ; yet were he placed under the screw of the confessional during that current summer, Jemmy might avouch that his present singleness of existence was his misfortune rather than his fault.

As a rule, Jemmy was not a ladies' man—not that he was awkward or a “gowk ;” his manners were quite the pink of politeness—not that he was ungenial or disagreeable in their society ; he was too unselfish in disposition, too “jolly” in expression, though taciturn, to be voted an odious or ugly man. His pet corns deterred him from croquet, his natural indolence damped waltzing aspirations, and for him lancers and quadrilles, *ne vaudraient pas la chandelle*. For dinner quaint originality made him, when in the vein, the most agreeable companion that any woman of the period could desire as escort from the drawing-

room ; and there were auspicious occasions when, on re-joining the ladies, he had been known to come so far out of his shell as to utter a comic song ; not one of the vulgar school of mongrel, Champagne-Charlie melodies that run riot in our music-halls and delight the ears of rampant counterskippers and *blasé* clerks, but one of the old school, quaint and refined, yet comical as Jemmy himself and antique as his grandsire. It is on record, moreover, that Jemmy, to fill a sudden and unexpected vacancy in an amateur *corps dramatique* of gentlemen only, was induced at the special behest of Ruby to do the Thespian, while the greatest "hits" of the final performance were his impersonification of the minor parts of the lovelorn milkman to Ruby as the coquettish Area-belle, and of Quasimodo to the same young gentleman as Esmeralda (burlesque).

Yet with all these casual variations from his general tone and inclinations, exception proved the truth of the rule, and Jemmy himself could not deny that women bored him so long as he could ride to hounds, stalk through turnips, or throw his fly by daytime, and enjoy his weed and rubber as a preventive to dyspepsia at eventide.

But Jemmy was fond of children ; if the adage may hold true, all good people are like him in this respect. It was the conventionality and affectation of the majority of young women that wearied him of their society ; it was the straightforward originality of children that had a charm for him. As he had confided to Ralph Romilly years ago, he "would not so much mind marrying to have two or three good little brats of his own, but he had not the

pluck to face a wife—and so he was choked off from matrimony.”

Children always took to him spontaneously, not that he went out of his way to bribe their friendship with dolls, tops, or sugar-plums—he had generally made a friend of a brat before he troubled himself to cement the alliance with any such appliances of this world’s goods ; but his physiognomy and tone had much to do with his influence, and many a wilful brat that despised governesses and sulked even at parents would flinch from Jemmy’s look of astonished displeasure, and yield to his half-hinted rebuke the obedience which temper and passion had denied to the beck and call of more orthodox authority.

Had Jemmy been asked before a committee of his views upon education and the management of children, he would probably, after an analysis of his due principles, have agreed that though, following the orders of the old school (Jemmy was Conservative in all points), there was nothing like a “licking to make a child grow,” and, theoretically, corporal punishment should always be held in reservation in the background ; yet, practically, if influence of eye and animus could not effect all that was wanted in nine cases out of ten, the error lay not in the material of the youthful mind so much as in the *gaucherie* of the educational artisan, who could not plan or practise the proper system of training and moulding his work to a pure and perfect model.

But it was this same tendency for children that slowly developed a new phase, and burnt insensibly Jemmy’s fingers before he was fully aware of his position.

Among all his *protégés* none had for the last dozen



years, since first he had ranked himself an Oxford "man," had greater claims for him or he for her than a second-cousin once removed — Georgie Warren. Jemmy had never any tendency or predilection for ceremony or conventionality of any sort. None of his *protégés* ever expected to hear from him any other appellation than that which had fallen to them from their godfathers and godmothers; and, least of all, would one who could claim relationship, however distant, have fallen in any other category. For many years had Georgie been a privileged romp with him, and it was with misgivings that he was playing false and violating a pledge of friendship that Jemmy, some five years ago, welcomed her, after six months' absence and a first half at a boarding-school, with a mere shake of the hand, to the exclusion of the more paternal kiss that had ever till then been a passport between them. But if conventionality had at last raised this barrier, cordiality received no lack on either side.

The colonel, her father, rented one of Jemmy's own houses at the London-super-Mare, and not only did business matters and change of air often bring Jemmy down to that locality, but the Maule welcomed at all seasons Georgie's form and face as readily as it did the grim good-humour of Jemmy.

The Sussex downs and Orleton bridle-roads had witnessed many a *tête-à-tête* ride at all times and seasons, varied on and off with the company of Ruby, whom the seniority of a short year seemed to privilege Georgie to pat figuratively on the back and to patronise as an authorised elder sister. And this went on till, in the past month of May,

Georgie was defined as formally "out," was presented at court, and allowed the run of a London season.

Jemmy Blake, as before explained, kept his chambers in St. James's, and had always a good hack or two at command when he chose to idle a few weeks in town and seek air in the Row.

He really had an ear for music, and never had failed to secure his stall at Her Majesty's; but this season, for no rhyme or reason, the stall expanded to a box of which no one were more frequent occupants than Colonel and Miss Warren.

Perhaps Jemmy had never found out or realised the fact that Georgie was, if not a regular-featured statuesque beauty, at least a pretty, piquant, child-faced belle, sufficient to make her, especially as an only and orphan daughter, the cynosure of many of the *jeunesse dorée* and *sans-soucie* of the summer metropolis. Yet, strange to say, he still teasingly called her "Baby," or "my dear child," as often as by her own name; and Georgie, though ready to stand on dignity with many a downy-whiskered whipper-snapper, as a matter of course endured and enjoyed the petting and scolding and occasional snubbing that Jemmy Blake was pleased to put upon her.

And Jemmy, as before said, had abjured dancing; and even Georgie opened her eyes when, one evening at Lady Curzon's, Jemmy actually volunteered and performed a brace of very creditable waltzes with her. This was but a flash in the pan; the unwonted exercise, coupled with Jemmy's utter want of condition, so upset his head and ruined his appetite for supper, that he never

was guilty of the same frivolity again ; and this imposed inertium, coupled with a hitherto unknown sensation of uncharitableness that seemed to pervade him when he beheld young Clifford of the Royals, heir presumptive to the best part of a Welsh county, securing three round dances in an evening, and too often finding excuses for dropping in at lunch-times, and making unexpected rencontres in the Row, had something to do with an unaccountable feeling of restlessness that seized the usually indolent soul, and spurred him in solitude to the banks of the winding Dove, and thence to the Welsh lakes, ere ever the mayfly had left the water.

But Jemmy was still restless, and ten days later saw him once more in his quarters in St. James's, or riding as before with his *protégé* neath noonday sun in Rotten Row ; while gradually the dormant truth began to realise itself to his stubborn, coy, yet hardly unwilling soul, that the creature he had petted and liked as a child, he had insensibly learnt to love as a woman.

For a month or more Jemmy buried and banished the reality as often as it rose within him, the more society had a charm for him that he could not or would not define to himself ; till one day, under the discussion of his morning havannah, the question suddenly struck his conscience as to whether he was justified, to himself no less than Georgie and the colonel, in concealing his change of ideas and purpose, or in playing the patron when he could no longer deny to himself that he was really fostering the lover.

Without recapitulating in detail the old, old story — old as man himself, and which daily rings the

changes of a few hackneyed variations of form and phrase; a language as much the offspring of eye and gesture as of mere lip-service—we may conclude by saying, that before the week was out, during one of the accustomed *tête-à-tête* rides, Jemmy sifted his conscience and screwed his resolution to sticking-point, and after a legitimate amount of beating the bush, blurted out to Georgie's astonished ears the tale of his transformation as regarded herself.

And she, half-incredulous, half-surprised, mortified for Jemmy's rather than her own sake, hung fire, as if in shy confusion for a second or two, and then stammered:

"Oh Jemmy, how could you! I can't—you can't, you don't mean it, do you? I always thought you were my uncle, or like something of the sort."

But Jemmy drew in his horns like a shot; and, contrary to his usual good-breeding—only excusable under his *distract* annoyance, and the utter emptiness of Kensington-gardens at noon-day—stuffed a cigar into his mouth, burnt his fingers in lighting it, and then said slowly through his teeth:

"Never mind, I didn't mean to tease you, child. Cross the road, and let us ride in the shade."

And the ride home was a dead silence.

Two days later Jemmy did what he had never been guilty of before—crossed Channel, and spent a month in Paris and the Continent in general. Then accepting a run in Lord Valehampton's (his uncle's) yacht, from Cherbourg to Cowes, found his way to London, to get his hair cut and overhaul his breech-loaders; and making

the appointment in question with Ruby, who had been kicking his heels at home since election Saturday, sneaked off to Bangor for a night, and thence to the Victoria, till the young one should join him to chase care from his seat *en croupe*.





### CHAPTER III.

#### RUBY EXPLAINS MATTERS.

**F**EMMY BLAKE was so bored with himself and his own company that he chartered a car by noon, and set off in quest of Ruby at Carnarvon station. The Holyhead train disgorged that young gentleman at the appointed time, faultlessly got up in gray tweed, with a portmanteau bigger than himself, and an unlimited number of fishing-rods and landing-nets. He soon deposited himself on the seat of the car, *vis-à-vis* to Jemmy.

“What on earth made you go abroad, you old stupid? Why couldn’t you wait till the beginning of the holidays and take me with you?”

“I couldn’t wait, Ruby—I wanted something to do. But I’ll go again now if you want a nurse to take you there.”

“No, it doesn’t matter; I’d rather stick to the salmon. I never killed one in my life, and feel as fit as a flea to land one.”

"We'll see when we get there next week ; meantime, try whether you can throw a trout-fly without flicking it off this afternoon. How are the horses?"

"Yours are in physic ; Owen had them up this week. I've been riding Lady with Georgie the last week or two since I came back—Hotspur's too slow for me another season, I think. He goes sweetly in harness ; we tried him on Monday with Aaron the breaker, and he went as if he had been at it all his life. Mamma's going to put him to station and hack work, and get me another—or rather, you are to look out for one before I go up to Oxford."

"You at Oxford !" grunted Jemmy ; "you've no business to leave school for the next three years. What are you in such a hurry about?—you'll never pass matriculation."

"I passed it last half, silly ; and I'm eighteen, as you know, next month. Don't call everyone a child because you are in your dotage. Stop ; did you get my letter ? You'll see about the Vale Hunt at once, won't you ?"

"Anything else you would like ?" Jemmy growled, but without that dogged look of resistance that he had often worn when combating some wild whim of Ruby's, to which he had in the long-run to strike his colours.

"Nothing that I should like better, old boy, and so will you, if you will shake off dull sloth and have a shot at the thing. It will do you a world of good at the election, if you really mean to go in for that ; and as for expense, you don't spend enough money as it is, and there are plenty of subscriptions."

Dark visions and forebodings rose before Jemmy Blake's

eyes of drunken whips and an unsound stud, kennel lameness and casual rabies, subscriptions in arrears, farmers obdurate, bills for earth-stopping, county-court claims, missing poultry and trampled wheat. Yet one glance at Ruby's face was enough to aid a brighter side to show itself—of scot-and-lot voters judiciously conciliated, of pleasures as well as cares of office, of beavers doffed at coverside in courteous welcome, of the independence of his own horn at the pommel, of himself the cynosure of drawing-room curiosity in a new county (strange perversion this of Mr. Blake's former doctrines and tenets of womanhood), of employment, excitement, distraction, to say nothing of digestion, at a time when of all others the former incentives, if not the latter, were most wanting to him. But Jemmy did not change his mind in a hurry; and even if he should avow no especial dislike to the course proposed to him by Ruby, he was not the man to violate modesty by proposing himself to a nearly strange Hunt as a new M.F.H., and that before his predecessor had been safely screwed down in his coffin.

But after a five-minutes' cogitation, during which Jemmy had recourse to his invariable havannah, and Ruby dived into the columns of the *Field*, the former looked up, and said in a very measured way, "I don't know, Ruby—it might do, and it might not. I should want a home, and haven't got one; I should want a stud, and where am I to find one? A pack of hounds aren't picked up every day, and I am not at all sure about money-matters. Besides, if I felt ever so inclined to try it for a season or so, I could not think of offering



myself, and I can't see why they should be at all likely to pitch upon me. I have next to no land in the Hunt, and have only been with them one season. I do not see my way at all; and more, if I succeeded in getting in for the east division, I could never afford to do the two for a moment."

"You talk as if you were a married man" (Jemmy winced), "with half-a-dozen mouths to provide for. You've only yourself to take care of, and you know you will never marry. I don't want you to go and cheek everybody by swaggering in at the next meeting, and saying you will hunt the county, before anybody has time to speak; but that's no reason why you should not go there quietly and listen, or anyhow wait, till they decide something, and see if they send to you. Of course no one had had time to talk it over after old Monsell was gone; but last season, when he was thinking of giving up the hounds, a lot of the fellows at the Sceptre were thinking of you, said you were a bachelor" (again Jemmy bit his fingers), "lots of money, as idle as sin, and hard up for employment—just the man for the job. It was Ned Masters who met Georgie and me, and told us about old Monsell. He seemed not to think so much about the old boy as the hounds; and almost the first thing he said was, that my cousin ought to take them."

"And if I did, where am I to live, pray? and how about stables and hounds? Even if I could afford to keep hounds for a season or two, I could not build in that way on land that was not my own, and in a county where I shall never in all probability be a resident."

"Lots of houses—perhaps Monsell's itself will be let.

Old Mrs. M. hates the place like sin, and always dragged him to Brighton or Tonbridge Wells when the hunting was over. The kennels, you know, are across the road, and distant from the house ; and even if you could not live there, I dare say she would be glad to let them, instead of pulling them down ; that is, if you could find even a farmhouse anywhere handy."

"The house wants lots of repair. I'm not going to sink money in it."

"That's her look-out, if she lets it to you furnished."

"And where am I to find hounds and horses?"

"Horses ! Lots of them at Tattersall's. A good judge like you ought to make a profit instead of a loss by a stud at the end of a season ; and the hounds, I should think, will be kept together if the new master wants them. Stick to it, old boy ! I'm sure you're game, if you only knew your own mind."

And Jemmy, counter-argued and foiled in all objections, was fain to yield a conditional acquiescence.

"Well, we'll see how matters go on by the next meeting of the Hunt. Don't you say a word about it to anyone. If you let the cat out of the bag that I have talked it over with you, I'll have nothing more to say to it—by Jove, I won't !" And Jemmy actually roused himself to energy in this final declaration.

"I'm game, I'm mum !" said Ruby. "Here, let's tumble out ; I suppose this is our public," as they landed at the door of the Victoria.



## CHAPTER IV.

### GENERAL INSPECTION.

**W**ITHOUT being guilty of any breach of faith in betraying ulterior views of himself and his cousin, Ruby managed to keep himself, and thence his cousin, thoroughly *au courant* as to the moves in progress relative to the vacancy in the mastership of the Old Vale hounds.

Ned Masters, a sporting gentleman-farmer, son of a local clergyman, was his principal correspondent, stimulated to a great extent by a box of grouse that had fallen to Ruby's share, after a few days' roving upon Lord Valehampton's moor in Perthshire.

Through the communicative Masters Ruby soon ascertained that the funeral had gone very nicely, and, except that the foreman of old D'Aeth the undertaker had got rousing drunk after the obsequies had been paid, and had thrown his horses down at the Bramham-road level crossing of the G.W.R., so that the empty hearse, still sticking in the road when the Flying Dutch-

man came by, had been transmogrified into splinters and touchwood, and the horses unmercifully butchered, there was no great news or variety in that line.

Mrs. Monsell was going at once to St. Leonards, to recruit her shattered nerves and console herself for her loss. Vale House was to be let at least for the next hunting-season, and there was to be a general meeting of the Hunt at the Hand and Sceptre on the 25th.

Nothing could be going more satisfactorily. A few days before the general meeting was due, a letter from Sir John Marshall, an elderly heavy-weight of great momentum in the county, reached Jemmy at Valehampton Lodge, asking him indirectly, and simply on his own authority, whether he would feel inclined to assume the duties of M.F.H. of the O.V.H., should the proposals of the general meeting on the 25th instant find favour with Mr. Blake in the important arrangements of subscriptions and general finance, adding that the old kennels had been secured for at least a three-years' lease from old Mrs. Monsell, and that he believed the hounds and Vale House would equally be at the disposal of the next master, and on very moderate terms.

Now that matters were becoming more imminent, Jemmy, who had for many days slept upon the former proposal and conditional plan of Ruby's without any great qualm, nervousness, or nausea, began to wince, show diffidence, and wish himself out of the troubles which seemed so spontaneously to be closing round him.

He doubted himself, his nerve, his popularity, and his purse. He thought he had best leave well alone. The duties of M.F.H. were well enough for an unencumbered

man of ten thousand a-year; but he had heard before now of a certain earthen pot that would fain voyage in company with brazen pans, trusting forsooth to compensate, by its metallic confidence of disposition, for the inferiority of composition; but its end was ruin and misery. Why should he not take warning, and draw in his horns in time?

But Ruby was not to be denied of his pet scheme, and returned to the charge more strenuously than before, flattering Jemmy's modesty, gibing his sloth, lauding his capacity; and in Valehampton and the other guests of the Lodge he found sturdy allies to his purpose, who put on the screw so vigorously upon easy-going Jemmy on the evening of the arrival of the eventful letter of Sir J. Marshall, that he gasped out under the genial influence of a bottle of Château Margaux.

"Anything, anything for a quiet life!"

And after a surrender so unqualified and so public, no further attempt to escape or breach of parole could possibly be contemplated.

Thus it was that on the afternoon of the 29th, in consequence of a formal missive, countersigned by the leading members of the Old Vale Hunt, which had reached the lodge on the evening of the 27th, Jemmy found his way to his reserved seat in the limited mail at Inverness—accompanied by Ruby, who readily relinquished the remains of the grouse that he might keep his *protégé* out of mischief—and having settled himself down upon "traveling sticks," and stretched his legs well into the opposite seat, laid himself out to sleep over the monotony of the journey to Euston as best he could. And Ruby, though

naturally loquacious, in consideration of his obedience and ready submission to his behests, bought up at Perth all sporting papers and magazines of all dates that he could lay his hands upon, and left him in peace to "gang his ain gait," and snore to his own satisfaction.

Jemmy, in his matter-of-fact, cold-blooded way, had written to order "supper and tubs" at the Euston Hotel on their arrival at cockcrow.

The former commodity they did full justice to—though to most Christians it would have savoured more of a *déjeuner*—and the luxury of the latter must be similarly earned by wayfarers to be thoroughly appreciated.

Fortified with a slight dose of rum-and-water as a nightcap, Jemmy, who had snored without intermission the whole journey, left orders with the yawning "boots" to see him called at ten in the morning; and then, in defiance of Ruby's entreaties, who pleaded for a cat-hunt till the parks were opened, and then a swim in the Serpentine, tumbled straight off to bed, and dreamt that the sausages that had composed his late repast had been resurrectionised to a pack of hounds, and he in their midst was sharing the fate of Actæon.

By 3 P.M. next day the Flying Dutchman from Paddington had so far done its duty that Ruby and Jemmy were discussing a late lunch at Sir John Marshall's seat at Ashton Grove. Two younger and more active members of the improvised committee, into whose hands the interests of the Hunt were for the time being delegated till some autocrat should be forced to take up the reins and responsibility of office, were also there to meet the expected guest, to drive there with him to inspect the

Vale House and the kennels, and to aid him to draw a sketch of future finance. The delegates of the temporary union were Ned Masters and Captain Winthrop, a retired cavalry-officer, moneyed, but by no means comfortably settled under the dominion of a wife nominally double his age and weight.

Sir John had exerted himself to the utmost to pave the way for the expected master, by conducting to the arrangements which have been before alluded to respecting the house and hounds of the defunct M.F.H.

The matters and details of subscriptions were soon laid before Jemmy, and old Gammon, the Ashton accountant, who had for years past officiated as dun and collector of the Hunt, at a premium of three per cent. upon good debts, was called in from the still-room to submit his prospect of a balance-sheet.

The Old Vale were a three-days-a-week pack, and the contributions of a fair sprinkling of country gentlemen within the range filled up some twelve hundred pounds per annum, leaving in round numbers another thousand to be found by the M.F.H. The general meeting had, moreover, voted for the current season a further sum of five hundred pounds, to be placed in the hands of Mr. Blake—should he or any really good judge of horseflesh accept the office—to be used unreservedly at his discretion in mounting the whips and servants of the Hunt. It was understood that Mr. Blake would have his own hounds, whether he compiled a new pack on his own account or thought it worth while to take to all or part of the kennels of the late Mr. Monsell.

Jemmy also had a better eye for a horse than a hound,

and dreaded the labour of advertisement and collection for a new pack so late in the season ; to say nothing of his knowledge of the shamble-legged, wall-sided, blear-eyed, riotous drafts that are always forced upon advertisers, perquisites of needy and greedy huntsmen, and warranted broke to "hunt anything," from a pig to a weasel ; and preferred, if the coming inspection confirmed the pleasing reminiscences that he carried with him of the level and loyal "mixed" pack that had led him so often during the past season over the Old Vale, to take to Mr. Monsell's kennels, or at least the working part of them, at the asset price suggested by the committee as a fair one to the relict of the defunct M.F.H. ; viz. thirteen guineas a couple if he took the working lot of them down to last year's entry, and eleven guineas if he was agreeable to take the whole lot—young entry and brood-bitches included. The stud of the late master was, to simplify matters, to go to the hammer at Tattersalls ; and insomuch as the servants' horses were the worse for wear, and the elephantine weight-carriers of the defunct were too much of a good thing for Jemmy's 12st. 7lb., this was the best possible arrangement.

One important question remained to be put. Supposing the arrangements should suit Mr. Blake, and he should take the mastership, would he hunt the hounds himself ? or, if he preferred to keep an active instead of a mere kennel huntsman, had he any objection to keep on Dan Morgan, who had hunted for Mr. Monsell for the last five years, and had been well entered under Charles Payne in the Pytchley country ?

In this respect also Mr. James Blake was agreeable to



meet the views of the committee, so far as to keeping of Dan Morgan at least for the season ; and for the present he considered the onus of mastership quite sufficient, without adding to his responsibilities by hunting hounds *in propria persona*.

The next step was a visit to Vale House, five miles distant ; and there was just time to do the thing nicely before the 8 P.M. dinner.

Vale House was not as "fit" inside as modern conveniences might have made it. The furniture was all old-fashioned, and in many cases the worse for wear ; but new chintz 'in the sitting-rooms would brighten up matters ; and the majority of the pictures were not to be moved for the current year. The billiard-table had a hill on one side of it, all the pockets had gutters leading to them, and the cushions were hard as nails ; but Thurston could send down and relay it. The bed-rooms were useful if not especially ornamental. The kitchen and cellars were good, for old Monsell had not been above the good things of this world, and could give one of the best dinners in the county. The stable, though not fitted with Adams's iron racks and mangers, or any such modern improvements, were clean, well drained and ventilated, containing fourteen stalls and five loose boxes.

A special message had brought Simms, the agent, upon the scene before the inspection was completed ; and the further proffered arrangements were speedily unravelled by him : cows and poultry left for the season to Mr. Blake's use ; hay to be taken at a valuation, if wanted ; the gardeners and keepers to be kept on at the usual

wages ; rest of furnished house, kennels, stabling, garden and stuff, upper part of park within rails and gates, comprising nineteen acres of pasture, five hundred pounds per annum ; inclusive of two thousand two hundred acres of shooting, one hundred and twenty of which were cover, and well preserved. The kennels, on the further side of the London road, a good half-mile from the house, sheltered on the north and east by rising grounds and larchwoods, and with a sunny southern aspect, were the final item for inspection and criticism. Accompanied by Dan Morgan, and armed each with a good double-thong, Jemmy and Ruby entered the yards, to receive a boisterous and generally affectionate greeting, decidedly to the detriment of clean boots and tidy trousers. Roisterer and Ransom, two habitual bullies, though some of the staunchest in the field, sulked in a far corner and glanced greedily at the intruders' calves ; but the majority welcomed Ruby so heartily that his waistcoat was indelibly defiled with the slimy paw-marks of cordiality.

The fathers of the pack had a fine patriarchal stamp about them, and the two and three-year-old entries had been carefully drafted of all imperfections. The Old Vale blood, especially the Blueboy and Gamester strains, was held in high repute in the Drake, Belvoir, and Beaufort kennels ; and old Monsell had been perhaps a better judge of a hound than a horse. The young entries and brood-stock were also paraded ; and without laying deeply to heart the entangled pedigrees which Dan hastened to pour forth so often as Jemmy's or Ruby's curiosity was turned towards some wire-coated, straight-

loined, sinewy aspirant at osculation, Mr. Blake seemed inclined to agree that it would be a pity that a pack that had been collected and bred with so much care should be left to the tender mercies of *Bell's Life* and Tattersall's hammer.

Mr. Blake was a man of few words, and was seldom guilty of buying a pig in a poke ; but his countenance betrayed no dissatisfaction as he thanked Mr. Simms for his company and attention, bade Ned Masters and the captain a cordial farewell, and, telling the agent that he would think over the whole matter before the next day's post, betook himself with Ruby, who had been studiously unofficial, and had followed Jemmy all day like an orderly spaniel at heel, to his dinner with Sir John, to indulge in a final cogitation and discussion before he cast the dice and crossed the Rubicon.





## CHAPTER V.

### ASHTON GROVE.

**S**IR JOHN MARSHALL, banker and baronet, kept house with all the cordiality of olden times, and the luxury and appliances of modern days. His *cuisine* was an amateur rival to Francatelli; his cellar deep and *recherché*. His servants were drilled to a hair's-breadth; his carpets mossy; chairs and couches deep and soothing; and the bed-rooms and their preparations were equally elysian. The entering guest would find his apparel, for morn or even, laid out at the precise moment; his fire blazing, if in winter; and no stint of open windows and fresh air (that bugbear of the British "slavey") in summer. Tubs, baths, hot bottles, slippers, Baden towels, or bootjacks were, as a matter of course, "cut and dried" for all guests, according to times and seasons.

The sedentary night, and rattle and turmoil of the last twenty-four hours, had begun to tell their tale of a reactionary weariness upon both the travellers, on Ruby per-

haps least of the two ; but neither was sorry to sink for a few moments into his easy chair before the open window, as soon as the 7.30 dressing-gong had ushered them to their respective quarters.

Jemmy had scarcely thought of rousing himself, and began to kick off his boots and discard his collar, when a tap at the door announced a flunkey with an array of cordials, and "pick-me-up" to whet the appetite ; of which dry Amontillado and Canadian bitters were exactly to the gentleman's taste. Ruby, who did not notice the sherry, and had a deadly horror of spirits in any shape (not having reached, or else having discarded in the nursery, that *esprit de corps* of hobbledehoy lads, under the care of army or university tutors, which leads them to esteem and adore, as *ex officio* manly, any taste, innocent, nondescript, or vicious, which is beyond their perception or understanding, and in all probability is an absolute nausea, yet is sought for and endured as *ignotum pro magifico*), declined any stimulant, and was perhaps none the worse for his abstinence.

The womankind of the house knew Ruby well, and Jemmy slightly. The latter never went out of his way to show up at county or hunt-balls, flower-shows, archery or croquet-parties ; but Ruby, a systematic little flirt, had been as common as a sunbeam at all such, when holidays emancipated him. Now, discharged from Eton, a matriculated member of *alma mater*, a definite Oxford "man," his independence was established, and he considered himself a free agent in society. Lady Marshall was plump and motherly ; she had no especial failing except a blind belief in the infallibility of her sons and daughters,

in their perfection of good looks, good manners, abilities, and physique.

Johnny Marshall, of age some six months ago, on which occasion the county rejoicings had been prolific, had a better opinion of himself than the world at large, his mother of course excepted, entertained of him.

His sisters were "fond" of "Jack" in the ordinary acceptance of the term, so long as his pleasures or counsels in no way ran counter to theirs. Sir John did his duty by his son; allowed him £500 a year, found him in a couple of nags and groom at Merton College, and had always a room for any guest he might choose to invite down to Ashton Grove. On the occasion of Johnny's twenty-first birthday, he had grudged neither trouble nor expense to proclaim the extinction of his son's "infancy," and inaugurate his new position in the county. As a duty to the family and the county members, he had lost no time in making Johnny the freeholder of a farm and messuage sufficient to place him upon the register of east-division electors; and though he shrugged his shoulders, and even once or twice launched into an attempt at contemptuous conviction and refutation of Johnny's principles, when the latter propounded at dinner Gladstonian views upon church-rates and tests' abolition and rental franchise, he used no pressure or interference with the liberty of subject or his theories, any more than he would have done with any opposition votes among his own tenantry; himself thoroughly liberal in his Toryism.

Had Sir John been cross-questioned on oath, and bidden define his son according to his own consciousness,

he would probably have said, on reflection, "Good lad ; does no harm to anyone ; and *thinks he's not a fool.*"

And similarly Ralph Romilly had defined Marshall, when the latter was up for election for the Bullingdon Club ; for which, to Mr. Johnny's disgust, he was promptly pilled the two first times of asking, though he secured an *entrée* at the third essay. "There's no vice about him that I know of ; but he's only half broke, wants a tight bearing-rein, a steady nag on the off-side, and lots of whipcord."

Mr. John Marshall's *personnel* would go far to define his character. His nearly black hair was close cropped in the orthodox Newgate fashion of the day, his whiskers respectable for his age, and moustache promising. A rather regular set of features forbade any enemy to call him plain ; a straight-cut mouth and vapid expression of eye licensed the most disinterested to assume him a fool. He was a decent shot, had a better theoretical than practical knowledge of riding and horseflesh in general, and could talk by the yard of what little he did know.

He subscribed to the "drag" at Oxford, though his first season had taught him to seek a less emulous scene of horsemanship ; and though thirteen stone would have taken him down, saddle and all, and his two hunters had been carefully selected regardless of expense, each at three figures, from the celebrated sale when the dynasty of Lord Stamford at the Quorn came to a close, he was invariably found in the "term time" in the ranks of the Bicester and Heythorp "heavy brigade ;" and a fair knowledge of the country of the Old Vale made his pink continually a valuable guiding-star through lines of gates

and bridle-roads when Christmas vacation brought him to the shelter of Ashton Grove. His "wines" were quite as frequent as his position demanded; and the name of his wine-merchant and cost of each dozen found him ample funds for conversation with any undergraduate connoisseur who would be so good as to criticise his cellar.

He was no great athlete; Tom Evans's sparring-studio for a fortnight enticed, but soon repelled, him; and the strong language of an angry coach, coupled with the contingencies of a wet cushion in a sou'-wester, disgusted him with the concomitants of torpid apprenticeship. He was in good odour with his "dons;" kept a fair if not an outrageous share of chapels; subscribed to the Holywell oratory, though only once seen there; and put the cards of the B. H. T. to no more menial use than that of luggage-labels. The wildest orgies of the Myrmidons had never, never beheld him inebriated; and he paid his losses at loo by draft at sight upon the Old Bank. His dress was scrupulous if not *outré*; and though he kept fairly within range of his allowance, a jeweller's account at Emmanuel's was one of his weaknesses. Fool though many voted him, he had passed responsions the first time of asking, and secured a third in "mods." with the aid of two coaches and a year's average reading. Under the new statute he had abandoned further classics in final schools, and was aiming sedulously at a class in "stinks." It was not so much capacity as that sixth sense of tact that was a scarce commodity with John Marshall. But that one thing wanting seemed to pervade his whole system, and stamp with mediocrity everything that he put his hand (or his foot) to. *Inter alia* he was a zealous



dancer, and with utter disregard of time and step generally succeeded in waltzing himself into a high state of perspiration. He "liked dancing, it was such capital exercise."

His powers of conversation were not even so exalted as might have been expected of even a third-class moderation man. His memory stocked his head with sundry cut-and-dried commonplace speeches and sentiments; but, on the whole, like crammed competitors for civil service, what little he had got into his head he seemed utterly unable to get out of it again, either for his own benefit or anyone else's.

Perhaps, after all, he was not so black as the cold charity of this sketch has painted him; he was not selfish—at least, not more than the majority of young men of the period. He was just and honest in his dealings, neither screw nor spendthrift; blind only to his own deficiencies, amusingly rather than officiously conceited. Neither ruffian nor rowdy, bully or braggart, ladies to some extent patronised him as a passable young man well furnished with expectations; men suffered him as one whose wine and weeds were better than his conversation, and shootings superior to the lot; and a cynic would have summed him up as an ordinary and harmless specimen of the common fool.

Sir John, strange to say, though he could never struggle beyond Little-go in his young days, was as agreeable and colloquial a host, as shrewd and far-seeing a man of business, as any in the kingdom.

And to the girls, Kate and Blanche Marshall, Nature had been more munificent than to the son and heir.

Though female intellect, however well developed, can never emulate or stand in the same field with that of an ordinarily clever man (who ever heard of any science or invention that could be traced to womanhood, unless it were a primeval mirror?); yet, on the other hand, tact never is so utterly wanting in a woman as too often it is in a lord of creation. Learning and common sense are by no means synonymous. Pedants are continually fools and blue-stockings idiots. Thus it was that, though the Misses Marshall had neither read so highly nor studied so deeply as their brother, they had acquired a more liberal share of non- and common sense—nothing beyond the average, but sufficient to enable them to hold their own in society, and, though not paragon belles, or any better than well-made, ruddy-complexioned, showy, yet lady-like English girls, to be popular at county *réunions*, and to have received one or two offers of marriage “not quite good enough for the present” to touch their own hearts intact, or tempt the acquiescence of the idolising and very worldly-minded Lady Marshall.

Captain Winthorp had sped back to attire himself, and escort his better and bigger half to Ashton Grove. These two, with the Rev. Henry Craven, Vicar of Ashton, made up the external complement for the dinner-table that evening.

The vicar had in early days been the life and soul of the 21st Light Dragoons, and had seen good service in the first Sikh campaign at Ferozeshah and Aliwal. Few could then go straighter in the “shires,” or better handle a favourite over a country for the “Grand Military.” When, to the astonishment of his friends, the major sold

out, and qualified at Cuddesdon for the service of the Church militant, his old friend the banker took the opportunity of the demise of the then vicar of Little Ashton to offer the ex-dragoon the berth ; and the latter, who had means of his own, and so was better suited in that point for the charge of 800 souls upon a commutation stipend of 220*l.* per annum, closed with the offer, and settled down. For the sake of propriety and conscience he never risked his reputation or influence with his flock by appearing at meet or joining the hunting-field ; but few phaetons could boast a more workmanlike turn-out than that of the parsonage ; and the still upright carriage of the subject, tanned complexion, concise style of language, ineradicable cavalry-swagger, and regulation cut of whisker (though the moustache had been sacrificed) could not but betray the soldier of the State as well as of the Church. Few men had a keener eye for sport, or more thorough knowledge of horseflesh ; no brother of the cloth had more strict ideas of the decorum due to it, or was more careful not to offend the propriety of weaker and foolish vessels. No chokered or Noah's-ark ritualist received more slippers and sermon-cases, or offers of altar-covers and embroidered stools and cushions. As a bachelor, and a strictly handsome one, though Punjaub summers and English winters had silvered his temples in many a spot, the parson was fair game to the petticoats of Ashton ; nor had seven years sojourn in celibacy in any way choked off the ardour of each rising generation.

“Dinner, Sir John,” said a sleek butler to the jejune assemblage, as the gong in the hall bellowed the same announcement for the benefit of the house.

"Mr. Blake, will you be so good as to take my eldest daughter?" said the baronet as he tucked Mrs. Winthorp under his wing, leaving the captain to Kate, and her ladyship to bring up the rear with his reverence. "I am sorry, Mr. Charles Blake, that we have managed so badly as to reserve no lady for you."

"Don't cry, Miss Ruby," said Blanche as she sailed off; "and don't tread on my train. Jack will give you an arm, if you ask him prettily."

And Ruby, diving his hands in his pockets, followed the procession, looking daggers at the son and heir who smiled patronisingly on him.





## CHAPTER VI.

### THE MAULE.

**B**USINESS was not broached till the ladies had made themselves scarce. Though the conversation during dinner had been commonplace, it had not been exorbitant. Miss Blanche was sensible and merciful ; she saw that Mr. Blake liked his dinner, and she did not risk the making herself officious or obnoxious by bullying him with unnecessary queries and cross-questions. She kept him going well with gossip and narrative rather than interrogatory, allowing him chances of opening his mouth between the courses. The *cuisine* was excellent, and Jemmy ravenous ; dishes and wines were mated with variety and felicity. By the time that the bottle had well circulated, and the ladies sought the drawing-room, Jemmy could not but confess to himself that he felt in the best of humours.

“Well, Mr. Blake, what do you think of the Vale House and hounds ?” said Sir John.

“House is big, and the furniture not much account ;

but I suppose it will be good enough as a bachelor's crib for what I want. The old lady must do up the drawing-room a little, and give me a coat of clean paint in the hall. I showed Simms that."

"Bravo! then you mean to come to us? Is that it? And you told Simms so?"

"I suppose I shall come; it seems right enough," said Jemmy rather dolefully. "I told the agent chap that I'd let him know by to-morrow's post. Five hundred a-year he asks, all found. How is that for price, Sir John?"

"Shooting and garden thrown in, and the kennels, of course, eh?"

"Just so; and the cows and poultry. I pay keepers and gardeners."

"Cheap enough, I call it. I suppose you'll go from next Michaelmas quarter?"

"Yes, yes. Let's be there and work the covers from the 1st. I go up for term on the 13th," chimed in Ruby, who had sat so far with mouth and eyes wide open, in satisfaction at Jemmy's ready acquiescence in the momentous question.

"Why, are you to keep house for him, young man?" said Sir John, half amused.

"I mean to set him going, and see him afloat before I leave him. He's going to give me whip's wages, and mount me for the cub-hunting."

"You deserve monkey's allowance," said Jemmy.— "It's his idea, this making a fool of me" (turning to the rest). "I do not think I should have undertaken such an office, but that the young one there bullied me into it."

"Then the O.V.H. owe Mr. Charles Blake a vote of thanks, which should be duly recorded," said his reverence, "and with Sir John's leave I beg to propose it."

"*Nem. con.* But our first duty is a bumper, and no heel-taps, to our new master.—Pass the wine, Jack.—How about the hounds, Mr. Blake; do they take your fancy also?" as he filled himself a brimmer of Madeira.

"I think I like them; anyhow, the working couples are bound to do; and in a day or two I shall have time to make up my mind about the young entries and the rest."

Ruby was an abstemious lad, but Jemmy could carry a good deal of liquid, and that discreetly. On the whole, ample justice had been done to the cellar by the time that coffee came in.

"Does your young cousin play a rubber?" asked Sir John of Jemmy when they had begun to settle down in the drawing-room.

"He can just hold his hand up and not revoke; but I do not think he is much use. Cannot your son make a fourth, and leave Ruby with the ladies?"

"The very thing, if Mr. Charles will excuse us. If I don't keep my son Jack out of mischief he'll want to sing, and that's awful—far worse than treading on a pig's ear—enough to ruin one's digestion for a week."

So Ruby was left to the tender mercies of Blanche and Kate, and photographic albums, and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, while the M.F.H. and his reverence carefully cleaned father and son out of three dozen sixpenny points.

The Maule britzska, in answer to Ruby's telegram, met the cousins at Orleton station the next afternoon.

"Hang it ! there's a croquet-and-tea fight," said Ruby, as they landed at the front-door, and caught the sound of clattering balls and voices on the back lawn.

"You have just come in time," said Lady Mary, as she kissed Ruby in the entrance-hall and held out her hand to Jemmy. "Georgie is holding a croquet tournament and we are very short of gentlemen."

And Georgie shouldered her mallet and met them as they debouched on to the lawn, receiving in a half-frightened manner Jemmy Blake's proffered hand, but hiding her nervousness by taking Ruby by the arm, and saying directly to him and more indirectly to Jemmy, "Come and make up a six set on the further lawn ; we are just ready—all ladies—and ought to have at least two gentlemen."

"I have given up croquet for years," said Jemmy with nonchalance. "When Ralph Romilly and his sisters first got the game from Ireland fifteen years ago, we had no vulgar slang such as Mayne Reid tries to introduce nowadays ; nor farfetched differences between ' roqueting ' and ' croqueting ; ' we invented the word ' croquet ' ourselves, as a more euphonistic and Frenchified form for the ' crooked ' or ' bandy ' piece of wood with which we played. I think the word ' rover ' a useful one ; we used to call such ' loose balls.' With us all strokes were fair with the head of the mallet, just as at billiards with the point of a cue, or at cricket or racket with any part of the bat. We were not allowed to hit twice or make a ' foul ' stroke, but we held the mallet as we liked, generally between the



knees, and used to make breaks of thirty strokes and upwards, on a ground sixty yards long. It was the subsequent fashion of crinolines that made ladies the advocates of a side stroke. The straight stroke, with elbows close to the side, played from the wrist, requires strength of wrist, but is infallible. I don't care to learn over again, or to be accused of spooning in my old age."

Ruby looked rather astonished at this decidedly crusty tirade, and said :

"Don't tease him, Georgie ; he is worried with cares of office, and the crown makes his uneasy head ache. He is the new master of the Old Vale hounds, and stands on his dignity ; he has got something at last to keep him out of mischief."

"Perhaps he has," said Georgie, half to herself, as she turned up the lawn with Ruby ; and Jemmy, looking after them till they had lost themselves in a group at one of the hoops, turned to inspect the stable and enjoy a weed till dinner-time.

"We did not know that you were coming to-day," said Lady Mary, as he was passing her at the garden-gate, "There is not exactly a dinner to-night—a sort of mixed lunch, tea, and supper. There are too many for one simultaneous dinner : nothing will be hot but soup, tea, and coffee, which will be at the same time ; you shall have your cup sent up later ; I hope you will not mind the other things being cold."

"Not at all," said Jemmy, in a better humour with himself and his weed. "Don't put yourself out about me, Aunt Mary ; I shall do very well. I'll come back in time to do the civil to the ladies in the dining-room ;

but I want to look over my horses that have been lately taken up from grass. Has Ruby told you that I have undertaken the mastership of the Old Vale hounds?"

"You have! I never thought that you were so energetic, Jemmy. The next thing we shall hear will be that you have set up house and got married."

"I have taken Old Vale House for a year from Mrs. Monsell," said Jemmy, wincing at the latter part of her speech, and taking care not to meet her eyes. "If you can help me in the way of servants and *ménage*, I shall be grateful."

"Of course; when do you take possession?"

"Next Michaelmas, or October 1st; not much time to look about me; but a bachelor will not want a very large staff to start with. I can go a long way with mutton-chops and clean towels. It will be something to talk about to-morrow when you are free. I must go to town and pick up some horses in a week or two; I suppose you will let Ruby keep me company?"

"He is safe anywhere with you;" and Lady Mary went back to her guests.

James Blake's stud of hunters consisted generally of about three useful horses and a young one in course of manufacture, one of which former would perhaps take to harness or dog-cart work in the summer, and another possessed sufficient good looks and style to do duty in the Row should the owner feel inclined for an idle month during the "season." During the present summer he had arranged to keep his non-working horses at his aunt's, and two of them had been duly summered, at first in the spring grass, and, when the first growth was over, in a

straw-yard. They had been now "up" nearly a month, had gone through the first stage of physis, and were getting on towards condition.

"How are the nags going on, Peter?" enquired he of Mell, his stud-groom and factotum; "Pell-Mell," as he was usually styled, from his ramming-cramming style of riding.

He had been a high-class steeple-jockey in his younger days, had broken his collar and the small-bone of his bridle-arm with periodical propriety, had never been detected in roping a horse, and had ridden the winner of some of the first-class handicaps at Cheltenham, St. Albans, and elsewhere. After his last accident, in Abdel-Kader's first Liverpool, he had become a victim to the daughter of the landlord at whose public he was tended—married, retired from active service, set up as trainer, and failed, as a matter of course, from want of capital; and, with the aid of a character from Lord Valehampton, fell on his legs in the service of Mr. James Blake. His professional practice of younger days was turned to good account in the tuition of "young ones," of which, as before stated, Mr. Blake had usually one or two in pickle, having rather a partiality for "making" his own hunters, though, in reality, Peter Mell seldom passed them on to the hunting-field till his own handling had made them pretty handy at their work. Once or twice Jemmy had been ambitious, and had run one of his stud for the local hunters' stakes of the Hunt which he patronised for the season; but hitherto his attempts—only two or three in number—had been unsuccessful, and he had neither inclination nor energy to attempt to amuse himself by keeping any regular steeplechasers.

"They be going nicely, thank you, master," replied Peter; "leastways, Duchess and the little ones; but that chestnut 'oss is a rummer customer nor ever he were. Wuss-tempered nigh every day he's out; won't jump at all unless he's a mind to; goes his own way; and put the lad down twice unawares last week. He's turning rogue, master, I'm feared."

"I found that out two or three months ago, Peter," said Jemmy. "I expect he'll go up at Tattersall's before long. How does the young one look? What can you do with him?"

"He'll be the best of the lot, Sir, seemingly; jumps very kind, and a wonderful galloper. He ought to make a 'chaser, Sir, if you've a mind for him that way. I should say he's a thoroughbred one, or near it, and he's beautiful in dirt."

"By King Tom out of Baroness is his pedigree I think; he was in Fobert's stable, but they thought he was a roarer, and never brought him out; he went back to Colonel Staveley, who had bred him, and was blistered on the throat before I bought him. Does he ring pretty sound in the wind?"

"Blows high at times, Sir, at first starting; but I should say it's nothing at all—not to stop his galloping; it aint as if he was to go for the Derby. He'll never stop with hounds, nor steeplechasing neither."

Jemmy proceeded to the five-stall stable, in which stood the family carriage-horses, and two of his own. Duchess was a big, slow, strong mare, steady and sound, but rather deficient in pace for the pastures of the Vale, though just the stamp for the ploughs, banks, and

cramped fences of the Orleton Hunt. The "little 'oss," Tommy, above alluded to, was a bay, fifteen  $1\frac{1}{2}$  nearly, by Ethelbert, thoroughbred, not fully up to Jemmy's 12st. 7lb., but fast, a perfect fencer, with wonderful back and loins, that made him feel a bigger horse when you were on him than when alongside. He was an especial favourite with Jemmy, who seldom had a fall with him; and preferred, if it was necessary, a short day on a safe and speedy mount, to a long one upon an elephant, who could not be depended to go the pace or negotiate his fences. Hotspur, Ruby's cob and boy's hunter in former years, made up the stable.

In a loose box on the other side of the yard stood Warrener, the unruly chestnut. He, too, had been in a training-stable, and had won a fair race as a two-year old. But his temper was too uncertain, and he never forgot a punishing head-defeat for the "New Stakes" at Ascot. From that time he hated the sight of a silk jacket; and though he performed well enough in "trials" at home, ridden by a stable-lad in fustian, he twice put his stable and backers into the hole by laying back his ears and sticking his toes into the ground when "wanted" on a racecourse. Neither blinkers, coaxing, nor operations had any effect upon him, and he finally passed as useless for racing purposes into the hands of F—— the jockey, and was ridden by him as hack upon Newmarket-heath. From him, as a four-year old, he was bought by Jemmy, one Cæsarewitch day; his make and shape looked well up to weight with hounds, and a cheque for 60*l.* effected his transfer.

The horse took kindly to jumping, and under Peter's

hands was ready for Mr. Blake's use by the following Christmas. He was fast, a big jumper, and never tired, however long the day ; and except that the old leaven now and then showed itself in the shape of sulkiness when asked to jump a fence apparently away from the line of the hounds and horses, Mr. Blake had every reason to be satisfied with his bargain, and even refused an offer of a hundred and fifty for him.

Probably much of the secret of the improvement that Peter had effected in the brute lay in the fact that his experience of similar animals led him to house a donkey in the same box with Warrener, with whom the savage soon fraternised, and displayed corresponding improvement in his temper. But the "moke" died suddenly of colic towards the end of the last hunting-season, and though a substitute was soon found, Warrener nearly kicked it to pieces, and could not be satisfied. He showed temper more than once in the middle of runs, and lost his rider his place in the van for the day. Jemmy took him on to London with him as park-hack, for which his magnificent shape and stride well adapted him, hoping to preserve his temper from further deterioration by keeping the same hands upon him as much as possible. But he was disappointed ; and though he was too steady a rider, with too strong a seat to be easily spilt, he could not help feeling awkward when once or twice Warrener stuck his toes hard in the ground in the middle of a canter, stuck up his back like a pig, and whipped round with his head where his tail should have been. He was not the sort of horse to be any safer in harness than for the saddle ; and the additional import-

ance that Jemmy should not be liable to be thrown out at the outset of a run, now that he had the cares of a mastership on his shoulders, coupled with the report of Peter as to later vagaries, now determined him to get the horse into dealer's condition, and let him take his chance at Tattersall's.

The last horse for notice was the Lady, a fourteen-three, dark-brown, thoroughbred mare of Ruby's, in her second season, a picture of beauty, clever as a cat, rather hot, and the envy of every schoolboy and light-weight in the two hunts. Jemmy had secured her two years ago for three figures from a London dealer; and Ruby used to boast monthly of the offers of two hundred and upwards that he had been bid for her sake.

"It is too dark to do much now, Peter," said Jemmy, when he had felt all the legs and finished his general inspection. "I will have a ride on the young horse about the close before we shoot to-morrow. Have him saddled by eight. If Mr. Charles wants to come with me I will send word what he will ride. Perhaps I may as well tell you that I am going to take on old Mr. Monsell's hounds in the Old Vale, and move into his house in a month. I shall have to pick up another horse or two before long; and I hope you will prove yourself up to the mark. Good-night."

"Good-night, Sir, and I wish you luck, master, I do," was the reply; "and I'll hope I'll give you satisfaction." Then to himself, as his master retreated to the house, "Well, surely summat like business; the sooner that 'ere Warrener goes the better, if this is going to be our game."



## CHAPTER VII.

### OVERNIGHT.

“**I**NTRODUCE me to your cousin, will you, Grace?”

“To which? I thought that you knew Ruby?”

“No, I mean the other that is just coming on to the lawn now; the master of hounds that you were talking about during the game.”

“Come across, then. Never mind the mallets; it is tea-time; we sha’n’t play any more, I suppose.”

“Jemmy, let me introduce you to my friend Miss Vane.—Clara, Mr. James Blake. They are going into the house, Jemmy. You had better take care of her. Miss Vane is staying in the house.”

And Georgie, who had recovered her equanimity, turned away to play the hostess to other guests of Lady Mary’s.

“There is a sort of tea going on, or dinner—half and



half. Will you come in, Miss Vane, and see what we can do in that way?"

"Thank you. Why did you not play croquet? We were so short of gentlemen—only Mr. Ruby Blake, Mr. Paget, and one or two curates. The old gentlemen would not join us; they thought it slow, I suppose."

"I must excuse myself in the same category. I am getting too old for the game: it tires me to stand about, and I can't risk lumbago by lying on the grass till my turn comes."

"You an old man! Well, I dare say it is convenient to call oneself so sometimes, Mr. Blake."

"Well, besides, I had to look after my horses that I left here; I have seen nothing of them since they came up from grass, and I have not much time left before the hunting-season. — What soup will you take, thick or clear?"

"Clear, if you please. Stop! Was it you that they were talking of just now as going to hunt the hounds here?"

"I am going to take the mastership of the Old Vale pack, the next country and this; but I am not aspiring to the labour of hunting them myself. I shall keep on the old huntsman."

"The Old Vale? That is somewhere near Sir John Marshall's. Do you know Ashton Grove? I often stay there. Blanche Marshall is a great friend of mine."

"I came from there this morning. It was a good deal through Sir John that I came to take the hounds. I formed his acquaintance when I was hunting in the country last winter."

"I was there at the hunt-ball, but I do not remember seeing or hearing of you, Mr. Blake ; did you not patronise it?"

"I hate balls; I am too old for dancing," said Jemmy.

"I hope you won't convert all the members of your hunt to the same doctrine, or Blanche and I, to start with, are sure to quarrel with you."

"No, you shall all have your dance the same as usual ; and I suppose they will expect me to be there now," said the M.F.H. despairingly.

"Isn't your cousin pretty?"

"Very," said Jemmy with a sigh.

"Isn't it a pity he is not a girl?"

"Who? isn't she one?" said Jemmy, whose thoughts were running on Georgie.

"Oh, I didn't mean Georgie, of course ; she is pretty too ; but I meant Mr. Charles, Ruby, or whatever you call him."

"Yes, he is very good-looking, but not a bit effeminate, for his looks. He is in the Eton eight, and rides very well too."

"Oh, ladies can ride, if that is all, Mr. Blake. I am very fond of it myself ; aren't you?"

"Hang the young woman!" mentally ejaculated Jemmy ; "she won't swallow her soup, nor let me have mine in peace."

"Oh yes, Miss Vane, I like riding." And Jemmy hastily sucked in two or three spoonfuls of oxtail.

"Where do you live, Mr. Blake?" said the inquisitor.

"I am staying here just now for the shooting.—Will

you have some cold chicken or grouse, or what, Miss Vane?"

"Some grouse, thank you.—Are you fond of shooting?"

"I do not mind it when I can get nothing better to do." Jemmy secured some grouse-pie.

"But you have not told me where you live regularly. I suppose you have a house in the Vale?"

"Will you drink claret-cup, champagne, or coffee? Champagne? Very well.—Live? O yes, I am going to take the Old Vale House for a year or two."

"How nice! You will be quite close to the Marshalls. I dare say we shall meet there sometimes."

"God forbid! A—a—I mean, will you have some salad?"

"No coffee, thank you," said Miss Vane to a flunkey who had prevented her from noticing Jemmy's stifled prayer.

"What are your horses like, Mr. Blake? I'm so fond of horses!"

"I can't describe them. One's chestnut, another's bay, two are brown; they're all pretty clean on their legs, if they're not all sound in temper. You may go round the stables to-morrow if you like. By-the-bye, just excuse me one second.—Ruby," said he, across the table, "I am going to try the young horse round the close before breakfast to-morrow; will you come out with me? If so, we will leave word when Peter comes in for his orders."

"Yes; I'll take out Lady, and get an appetite. How are all the horses?"

"Peter's very full of the young one, who he says is a clinker. Tommy is looking well; Duchess must, I think,

take to harness, as she will be too slow for regular work in the Vale ; and Warrener is going to Tattersall's."

"Sell Warrener? Why?"

"Warrener going to be sold?" asked Georgie.

"Yes ; his temper is getting worse and worse ; they can do nothing with him at exercise ; he stops short in his canters, and will only jump when he's in the mood for it."

"I am sorry he is going ; I used to like him so much in the Row this summer."

And then she stopped in confusion, and became diligent at cold chicken.

"Are you sure there is anything wrong with Warrener, and that it is not the fault of the grooms? Those sort of horses only want handling, and rough usage spoils their mouths and their tempers," said Mr. Algernon Paget, a member of the Old Vale Hunt, conspicuous always for his Bartley tops and faultless breeches, the massive fold of his double-breasted pink, and exquisitely-polished bridle and stirrup-irons. The ladies always were taken with Mr. Paget's get-up ; even the men owned that it was most workmanlike, and that his horses were cheap at three figures ; but he was better to look at than to go, and no man "lost" more girths and stirrup-leathers, or stopped to catch more runaway horses, among the blackthorn fences of the Lower Vale. His Samaritanism in this latter respect closed the mouth of many an otherwise traducer.

"I do not think anything could be made of the horse. He is a very fine one, and will no doubt sell pretty well for his looks alone."

"I'd buy him myself, but I can't afford another horse just now, though I am short of one," said Paget, whose string was always six, and who had never been known to sneeze at a hundred and fifty for a nag with a good character.

"I'll let you have him cheap, and take eighty for him," said Jemmy quietly.

"There's a chance for you, Mr. Paget!" put in Miss Vane.

"You're very good; but I must do without another horse till Christmas," said the gentleman, who could not reconcile the price with the style in which he had seen Warrener go in the spring under Jemmy's 12st. 7lbs.

"Here's an offer for you, Paget," said Jemmy; "I'll *give* him you if you can ride him three times round the fences in our close in half an hour, and throw you a lead in."

"I'm only staying a couple of days at the rectory, and I've got nothing to ride in, my dear fellow."

"I'll lend you cords and gaiters; you can always get up in them, if they are within a yard of the size."

"The ground is so hard, and the fences as blind as a bat."

"They're all artificial—banks with furze mounting, and dry dug ditches, or close hurdles with gorse tops. There's nothing blind in the place; the horses go over some or all of them most days."

"It rained cats and dogs last night, and is beginning again now," said Ruby.

"Do go for it, Mr. Paget," said Clara Vane.

"Never refuse a good offer," said Georgie demurely, as she saw Ruby's eyes twinkling.

"It's all right, old fellow. I'll send the clothes down to the rectory in the brougham," said Jemmy. "We'll meet in our yard at 8 A.M."

And Mr. Paget could only murmur an acquiescence, and a confession of his dislike to "take advantage" of Jemmy Blake's good-nature.

"Is he a good rider?" said Miss Vane, returning to the charge with Jemmy.

"I suppose so," said Jemmy, as he reached the champagne-bottle. "Let me fill your glass."

"Will you give me some tipsy-cake, if you please, Mr. Blake," she continued, as Jemmy filled her a bumper, and did ditto for himself.

Jemmy mechanically obeyed.

"Won't you take some yourself? It looks so good."

"No, thank you; hate sweets," said Jemmy.

"Do you? I thought all good people liked sugar. Don't you even approve of puddings?"

"No," said Jemmy, as he tried some caviare.

"Not even wholesome ones—rice or a hasty-pudding?" continued the gossip.

"As soon touch a sloe-pie," said the victim.

"Don't laugh at me!—Where are you going to shoot to-morrow?"

"I don't know. Somewhere behind the Home Farm, I suppose."

"I like looking at shooting. May Georgie and I bring out lunch in the pony-carriage, and lay the cloth for you?"

"O dear yes ; much obliged," said Jemmy, who thought he saw a prospect of saving himself trouble.

"May we come and see Mr. Paget ride to-morrow morning?" she half whispered.

"The grass will be too wet. If you like them to call you at seven, you can put on goloshes, and go to the ha-ha at the end of the kitchen-garden ; the course goes close to it, and you can see all the close. Don't stand half hidden, so as to make the horses shy when they come upon you suddenly. I don't want to throw Paget unfairly."

"Will he get *spilt*, as you call it?"

"He may stick on ; but I doubt if he will be able to get round three times, if all that Peter tells me is true."

"Is this your pocket handkerchief?" he continued, as Lady Mary gave the signal for exit, and Miss Vane rose to leave the room.

"Thank you. I hope you gentlemen will not be too long at your wine ;" and Miss Vane made herself scarce.

"Where did Georgie pick that girl up?" asked Jemmy of Ruby, as the superior beings moved for the benefit of those who wanted to smoke. "It's ten o'clock now ; we won't go into the drawing-room till the carriages come, so we can smoke without injury, those who like it," offering his cigar case to the four or five gentlemen assembled, all of whom but Ruby, and a curate who was itching to have a conversation with Miss Vane, gladly seized the opportunity of the indulgence.

"I do not quite know. They were friends at school,

and I think they met at Hastings years ago. Don't you like her?" said Ruby, in answer to Jemmy's interrogatory.

"There's no vice about her that I can see ; but I wonder she can carry any flesh at all ; she is really in very good condition. I'm sure *I* can't talk and eat too."







## CHAPTER VIII.

BEFORE BREAKFAST.

66 **T**HERE he comes!" said Ruby, ready dressed, as he looked forth from Jemmy's open window while the latter completed his toilette.

"Throw me the button-hook; be ready to meet him when they answer the bell. By Jove, he's got spurs on!"

"You forgot them; I slipped a pair into the brougham just as he was starting."

"It's enough to mucker any chance he has; that animal won't stand a spur at any price; I'll take short odds he puts him down the first round if he pricks him. I always ride him bareheeled, you little imp."

"You ought to thank me, you old fool! What's the good of throwing a chance away? It is not as if you had any bet, and had made terms. A pair of spurs are cheaper than horseflesh, and you are never safe to halloo till you are out of cover. Suppose he gets round his three times?"

"Grandmother!" said Jemmy. "Run down and get someone to hold his pony; say I'm coming."

"Ruby," called Georgie, as she put her head out of a door on the landing with a foot or two of brown hair adrift on her shoulders, "when do you begin? I sha'n't be ready for ten minutes. Do get them to wait."

"I'll get you five minutes' law if I can. Look sharp! never mind your thatch; it looks very nice. Come to the end of the kitchen-garden, and you'll see it all. It's a quarter-past eight already."

Ruby escorted Paget into the breakfast-room, the only apartment as yet cleared for action.

"I hope you feel fit," he said to his guest. "Jemmy will be down in a minute. Will you have anything to pick you up before we go to stables?"

An egg and sherry was just the thing for Mr. Paget, and by the time that he had swallowed it, with a biscuit to preserve its gravity, Jemmy had joined them, and they stalked off to the stables.

Algernon Paget was not so deficient in seat as in nerve; it took an awkward horse to put him down when once up, and he was not guilty of "cutting voluntaries" in the hunting field. The difficulty was to induce him to risk himself outside a nasty horse or over an ugly fence; if he could screw up his courage to do this, he had sufficient science to enable him to acquit himself creditably.

He had made a mistake in not asking for brandy-and-soda instead of the milder stimulant of egg and sherry. Dutch courage would have been worth everything to him.

He sat down upon Warrener in a decidedly workman-

like manner as he ambled him gently up the yard and out into the close, preceded by Ruby on the Lady, and backed up by Jemmy on the "young one."

The close and two adjoining small pastures were laid out with the artificial fences before described by Jemmy; where real fences had existed on the line of gallop they had been removed, stakes and stubs dug out, and fresh barriers built up in their places.

The circle was about 1400 yards, the enclosures too small, and the turns too sharp for real steeplechasing or for trying the racing merits of any long-striding nag; but the place was admirably adapted for schooling raw hunters and steeplechasers in mere fencing.

"We will both lead you if you prefer it," said Jemmy to Paget, "or one shall go behind you, as you like; perhaps you are less likely to get trodden on in case of a fall if you ride in the rear of both."

This comforting and thoughtless speech nearly upset the horse-tamer's nerves, but he had self-command to reply, "I'll follow last; perhaps it is best."

"Look at your watch, then—so will I; half-an-hour to get round three times; one horse at least always to lead you. If you win, you're a better man than either Peter or myself; and you've well-earned the horse."

"Come along," said Ruby; "it's horrid cold;" and he put the Lady slowly at the first flight of hurdles.

Jemmy's young one was rather eager, but cleared a good twenty foot in his stride as he followed, and Warrener cocked his ears and followed suit in good style.

The next two were furzed banks, with dry ditches on

the farther side, and were easily negotiated ; then they reached the pastures, crossed them, turned round a farm-building that marked the limit of the course, and came back in the same tracks till they regained the close. They then swung to the left, under the garden-wall, to a line of fresh fences on the opposite side of the enclosure to which they had started. As they cleared the next hurdles, Jemmy looked back to see how Warrener was coming, and was rather surprised to see Paget sitting nicely down, his hands low, and his body well back at each drop. "He sits well enough so long as he don't flinch," thought he.

"Shove along, Ruby," he added aloud, "and make a pace ; we must choke him off and frighten him.—By the holy ! what's this ?" said he in the next breath as they shot from a slow canter to a hand gallop, and were close upon the next fence.

On the top of one of the ordinary furze-banks had been built up a stiff oak-rail—a post at each end and one in the middle to support it—a nasty balking jump, with a lot of daylight between the furze and the rail, enough to deceive many a horse. And the *tout ensemble* was nothing short of five feet from the ground, with a ditch towards them.

Ruby had no time to answer. Clack, clatter, rattle, came the Lady's hoofs as she hit the rail all round and dropped as safe as a cat on the other side, Ruby rather shaken in the saddle from the concussion, but recovering instantaneously and sitting well back again. In less time than it takes to say this, the "young one," seeing what was expected of him, had cocked his ears, gone straight

at the centre post, and landed ten feet to the good on the farther side of the fence, without having touched a hair's-breadth of the rail.

"By George, he can jump, though!" said Jemmy, as he turned round to watch the progress of the Warrener, who had not got into his gallop so quickly as the leaders.

Paget's heart was in his mouth as he came to the rail, but it was too late to turn. There were hurdle sidings to lead up to the jump, to say nothing that petticoats were visible at the ha-ha, and the whole posse of grooms had taken up quarters on an empty spring-cart in the middle of the close. Warrener could jump if he chose, and he was in a good-humour; his rider had just nerve enough left to sit extra far back as the rogue rose at it, and with a little rasp of a hind-fetlock, came safely over it.

"Thank goodness!" thought the reprieved one. Then, seeing that the next flight of hurdles were nothing formidable, he stood up in his stirrups to ease Warrener's stride, and shooting up to Jemmy, as he patted the animal's neck, exclaimed, "Best horse I ever rode in my life; jumps like a deer, and as good as gold; he only wants——"

Flop! Warrener's reminiscences of the usual contingencies of a jockey standing up and sending him along a cracker, stimulated by a slight pricking of the spur, had suddenly flashed into his equine brain: as instantaneously he had stopped, stuck his toes into the ground, spun round upon his near fore-leg, and sent his rider flying like a sack half-a-dozen yards over his tail, in

the original direction in which they had been proceeding; then, satisfied with the performance, he dropped his head and began to graze without further to-do.

Ruby was over the next fence before he had found out that anything was wrong; and Jemmy, though he heard Paget's exclamation of horror as he found himself flying in mid-air, did not like to risk spoiling the "young one's" education by pulling him up under a fence, so let him follow before he checked him and turned to see what was the matter.

The grass was nicely saturated by the night's rain, and Paget, more frightened than hurt by the aerial journey, was sitting up trying to realise his whereabouts, by the time that his companions had got up to him. Ruby looked to see if he seemed injured; and then, first taking the precaution to dismount, unfeelingly laughed till he was nearly black in the face. The posse of grooms came up at a run, while Jemmy also dismounted, and giving his friend an arm, assisted him upon his legs.

"Are you damaged, old boy?" said he, in concern at the result of his experiment.

"Only shaken a little. How the deuce was it all?"

"The horse stopped, I think," said Jemmy, swallowing his laughter; "I dare say he won't do it again. There's only ten minutes gone now, and we have been once round all but these hurdles; won't you try again?"

"Not if you paid me for it! I don't mind fences, but I can't stand such circus tricks as these.—Lead him back, will you, Peter?" he continued to the latter, who had without difficulty captured the now demure-looking

Warrener.—“I shall go in across the lawn and get a drop of brandy.”

“Oh, Mr. Paget, I hope you’re not hurt!” said Georgie sympathisingly, as she met him in the garden putting on a limp as the crinolines came in view.

“I hope not, Miss Warren,” said the fallen hero rather dolefully; “but that horse is such a devil! I beg your pardon. But who could have thought of his playing such a trick as that? One lives and learns. By Jove, I thought I was never coming down again!”

“Come in and have some breakfast; or would you like us to send for the doctor?” said she doubtfully.

“Oh no!” with a tone of resignation; “I am very grateful for your sympathy, but there are no bones broken.”

“The horse used to do like that once or twice with Jemmy in Rotten Row last June,” said Georgie. “I suppose he would not put you up to his tricks, lest you should have conquered him. I sent Clara in for my vinaigrette and some brandy,—here she comes!” and a sip of *eau de vie* soon lulled the limp into oblivion, and made Algernon himself again.

“How long has that rail been upon the last fence but one under the garden?” asked Jemmy of Peter as he rode back; “it’s too big for safe practice, and is not built up from the furze to the timber; it is enough to balk four horses out of five; the ‘young one’ here was the only one that did not touch it, and I was afraid he was going to overjump himself.”

“Ah, he can jump, Sir, he can; but it was Mister Charles as told me to make a big one or two somewhere,

to frighten Muster Paget, like. Says he, 'It can't be too big, Peter; and the ground's nice and soft; and make it stiff,' says he. 'There's nothing like timber,' says he. So I had Stone and me and gardener a digging and sticking the postesses sin' sunrise or more. No offence, master, I hope?"

"No harm done, Peter; and I am glad to find that the 'young one' can jump so well. He has grown, has he not, since the early spring?"

"Pretty nigh half-an-inch, Sir; he's nigh sixteen one by the standard the other day."

"Walk them up and down till they're cool," said the master, as he dismounted in the yard, and turned into the house, followed by Ruby.

"You young sinner!" said Jemmy, as he took his cousin's arm, "you nearly broke all our necks by meddling with the fences; and you didn't funk him or bring him down after all."

"Didn't I?" said Ruby. "I did just as good; if he hadn't got so cheeky at clearing the big rail, he would not have had the pluck to use his spurs and get spilt. By Jove, how I laughed! he did look such a fool, sitting up on his tail in the mud."

"We must ask him to stay and shoot, and lend him a gun, after gibing him in this way."

And so they reached the breakfast-room.

"You'll stay and shoot with us to-day, will you not, Mr. Paget? There are plenty of guns in the house, if you have not brought yours. The girls are going to drive out, and bring lunch to the bottom of the Hurst Bank."



And this latter clause alone decided Paget upon accepting with *empressement*.

Clara had during the morning walk told the luncheon plan to Georgie, who at first set her face dead against it.

"A great deal of trouble, and they would rather be without us," said she.

It was not till Clara mendaciously added, "Georgie's cousin had expressed a wish for their company," meaning Ruby, but understood by Georgie as a command from Jemmy, that she consented to obey, half-frightened, half-pleased at the order.

"I have picked out a good Lancaster central-fire of Jemmy's for you," said Ruby to Paget as they sat down to breakfast, "and I'll find you some knickerbockers. I'm sorry you've dirtied the breeches."





## CHAPTER IX.

### RECRUITING.

“**H**AD no idea that Leigh Haughton was going to break so soon ; but perhaps, on the whole, it was the best thing for him, before he had run through his wife’s money as well as his own.”

“You will be the gainer anyhow, Jemmy. The sale is just in the nick of time, and he had A 1 cattle under him at Leamington this last season.”

Ralph Romilly (hitherto behind scenes) had been spending a rational afternoon with Jemmy and Ruby Blake, in inspection of the stud of an ex-captain of the Blues who had lately retired by sale of his commission, and sent his horses to the hammer at Tattersall’s.

Ralph, who had seen something of the horses and their performances when he had “sent on” from Oxford to the more accessible meets of the Warwickshire, or had met the patrons of the Spa on the half-way borders at Fenny Compton, had joined his brains and experiences

to those of Jemmy, as they passed from box to box and stall to stall of the new establishment at Albert Gate.

Ralph's father, brother of Lord Valehampton and Lady Mary Blake, had married an heiress in his early days, settled down to a fair landed estate in the north-east corner of the Bicester country, devoted himself to hunting and silently representing the county in Conservative politics for some five years, till a drunken engine-driver on the L. and N.W.R. put a sudden end to him on his return from a debate upon the Chartist riot, by charging a broken-down coal-train, in defiance of flags and signals, killing the unfortunate Honourable Charles Romilly and eight other passengers, maiming another score for life, and doing his best to atone for the evil by fracturing his own skull at the same time.

The reckless eagerness with which, without any previous intimation or attempt to break the news of the catastrophe, the railway officials conveyed at dead of night the scattered remains of the M.P. to his seat at Wrotesden Park, proved fatal also to the Honourable Mrs. Romilly, then within a week of her confinement; and before another forty-eight hours had elapsed, Ralph, Mary his sister, and a new-born baby were orphans, under the joint guardianship of Valehampton and his sister.

Ralph was in the middle of his fourth year at Merton College, Oxford, and just awakening to the awkward realities of final schools after a long and easy spell of idleness. He had come of age some months before this date, but, beyond clearing a few rooms for occasional bachelor use and setting-up a new billiard-table, had

done nothing towards providing any final establishment or attempting any domesticity at Wrotesden.

His sisters were still "infants" in the eye of the law, and under the charge of his uncle, with whom they lived; and without their or some such equivalent company he, Ralph, did not care to live in solitary grandeur; generally dispensing the favour of his vacations with his relations in turn, but confining his summer months only to his sisters, in consequence of the inferiority of the hunting round Leconferry Park in Sussex, the usual country-seat of Valehampton. He had served apprenticeship in the way of defeat, if not disgrace, as seven in the Radley eight, in two essays for the Ladies' Plate, and thence had been promoted to the berth of No. 7 in the Oxford eight in two successive victories against Cambridge. Scaling little over 11st. 7lbs. in full training, and not two pounds heavier even upon a loose diet, he could ride 13st., and could waste on emergency to 12st., saddle and all, went as straight to hounds as any of the rough-shod riders of the 'varsity, and had a better eye for hounds and a country than any of them. Under his mastership the "drag" had shown better sport in the past season than on former records, and even in a catch-weight college "grind" he could hold his own, and win a sweep with the most feather-weight freshman.

The Romilly family were unexceptionably handsome. It was through his mother that Ruby Blake inherited that strange girlish beauty that so belied his capacity. Ralph, though on a far larger scale, was cast much in the same mould—as fair, but not as fragile; rather more manly in style from his superior height and physique, his

face embellished with promising whiskers, but adulterated with no cockneyfied or unwarranted moustache.

With a liberal allowance for the present, and ample provision for the future, no fear that future professional prospects should hinge upon his performance in the schools, added to a too natural love of ease and indolence of mind—though he was always ready for emulous physical exertion—there was small wonder that Ralph had never troubled himself to add to the fatigues of the “moderators” in the honour-schools, but slipped through with an easy pass on that occasion. However, he had fair abilities, if he could but be persuaded to use them; and it was in consequence of a private request and arrangement with his college dean,—who engaged to stave-off any danger of rustication that might have been contingent upon Ralph’s entire absence from college-walls upon the night of Blair Athol’s Derby, on condition that Mr. Romilly, who as a rule was a pretty steady hand at morning chapel, and had never been seen intoxicated or indulging in a bear-fight, would put on a good coach, and see what he could do in the way of a class for final schools,—that he later on laid himself out for honours in “greats.”

The storm passed over with no worse consequences than a week’s gate from 8 P.M. ; and Ralph, in discharge of his obligation, had spent the whole of July and August, and the first two weeks of September, in the Channel Islands, under R— of B.N.C., abandoning grouse and birds, with praiseworthy resignation to his fate and to the “greats” forthcoming in December. He had then come up to Oxford to continue his work

through the dreary dulness of the tail-end of a Long Vacation; and partly for the sake of change, and to gratify his cousins' and his own anxiety, had joined them at the Grosvenor Hotel for the last Sunday in September; spent the afternoon as above described at Tattersall's; had attended Wells-street evening service with them; enjoyed the anthem; sacrilegiously slipped out before the sermon; then settled down to an 8.15 dinner, and did justice to the resources of the *ménage*.

Jemmy had long ago come to the same conclusion as Ralph upon the subject of the Leigh-Haughton horses, and replied, in answer to the opening observation: "The horses are good enough, but they will fetch such a figure. The shooting-season is slack, and there will be lots of buyers. I shall try to get two of these somehow—the gray and the young chestnut for choice. It depends upon how prices run whether I go for another couple to-morrow, or bide my time."

"I agree with you as to the young one; he went very well when he was quite raw last March. Haughton could always shove them along a bit; but I do not think the gray has much constitution—a sick and sorry sort of beast. I fancy he 'stopped' one day at Fenny Compton, though Haughton made out it was a lost shoe. He can jump well at starting; but I suspect he's only a once-a-fortnight customer. I like that sister to Angell's Cooks-boro better than anything, though she has a blemished knee; she scarred it by accident one day, when Haughton was staying at Aston for the night, and went over to Bradwell Grove. She put her foot on a loose flint,

blundered, and pecked a wall as she rose to it. It was a bad cut at the time, and Haughton swore like a sinner; but she's the steadiest fencer of the lot to my mind, and the scar will choke off many of the 'fancy.' I'd cut in for her if I were you."

"There's a four-year-old in that draft of Lord Oswestry's from Woodyeates that goes up to-morrow that I'm thinking of bidding for," said Jemmy. "He is by Ethelbert, a good cross-country stock, and has some curious malformation of the knee-cap that makes him a little too stiff in his action to be any great form in the flat; but he won a welter race once at Brecon as a three-year-old, and is an uncommonly well-ribbed-up one. He has gone slow this year, and ran nowhere; the knees look as if they had been broken, and stamp him as blemished; but he was foaled so. I saw him sold at East Aston three years ago as a yearling, and he had the same curious conformation then. If he goes cheap, I shall let Peter see what he can make of him."

"I have seen that sort of horse before," said Ralph. "The patella has a triangular plate at the top instead of being rounded. Gayboy, a thoroughbred one like this, and with similar knees, won some good handicaps over country in the midlands a couple of years ago."

"How far ought we to bid for that little horse of Austen's that we were looking at?" said Ruby. "I am to have another this year instead of Hotspur, and this brown horse looks just the thing. May I bid for him, Jemmy?"

"He's a good-mannered one; but has seen too much wear and tear. I have heard of one lately that will be just the sort for you," said Ralph. "He is in Ellis's

stables—Gamecock—you may have heard of him. He won a good military steeplechase or two, and lost the big handicap at Warwick by a head. That race broke his heart, and he became cur—turns it up now whenever he is collared. They put the money down for him at Bedford and Croydon; but he cut it when he had all his own way at the finish. He's sound, no vice, except that he coils into a canter when it comes to a finish, is a perfect hunter, a little one, but handsome—not such a rogue as old Warrener—and they are so sick of him that they will let him go for a hundred. He fences temperately, and doesn't rush like so many horses do just out of training. I larked him last Friday over their training-ground, and he went A 1. You can try him any day this week you like, Ruby. I booked them to give me the refusal of him to the end of the week, and meant to have told you of him sooner."

"We'll go there to-morrow," said Ruby. "He might do very well for me. You come too, Jemmy, as I mayn't buy anything without you."

"Ring for coffee," said Jemmy. "Let's turn in early; we can't play billiards on Sabbath-days, and there's nothing in any of the papers."

It was a dripping, dreary afternoon that they spent at Tattersall's on the Monday. The fully-advertised 'draft from Woodyeates and Leigh-Haughton stud drew a goodly assemblage of buyers—gentlemen, dealers, commission-agents, copers, and the usual throng of helpers, broken-down stablemen, and touts, looking out for odd-jobs and stray sixpences, accosting everyone, even the lady-like Ruby, indiscriminately as "captain" and "colonel," and



looking more dragged, more dirty and repulsive, than was even their wont.

The gray of Leigh Haughton's stud was run up to 230 guineas, from his looks alone and the general reputation of the stud ; but Romilly's scepticism as to the merits of his constitution had caused Mr. James Blake to cry content when the animal reached 120 guineas. The sister of Cooksboro, Belleboro, became his for 115 guineas ; and for the young chestnut the hammer fell to the same nod for 170. The Ethelbert horse with the queer knees found so little favour, that Jemmy secured him also for 24 guineas ; and he picked up at an average of a "pony" apiece two useful-looking light-weight hunters, sold singly and without an owner's name, that would do to experimentalise the whips upon.

"That will do," said he, as he booked his last purchase : "these screws and the two that came from Bretherton and Harrison's will keep the hounds going till cubbing is over. It plays the deuce with Duchess and my own horses to do huntsman's duty on hard ground, as they have this month, and in no condition. That young one is too good to spoil, Ralph ; I rode him that morning when Warrener put Paget down, as I told you. He'll make a steeplechaser ; and it's a sin and shame to rattle him with cub-hunting."

"Here the old rogue comes," said Ralph, as Warrener was trotted up to the entrance, clean on his legs, full, but not gross, in the barrel, a coat like silk, and looking the beau-ideal of an English steeplechaser.

"No. 107, Warrener, gentlemen, by Idle Boy out of the Rabbit ; master of fourteen stone, and well known

with the Old Vale and Orleton hounds; very fast, and believed to be sound. How much for Warrener, gentlemen? A hundred? Eighty? Sixty? Will no one start the horse at fifty? Forty guineas bid. Thank you, Sir. Trot him down again." And no fault could be found with Warrener, shape or action. "Forty-five guineas"—and a seedy-looking scoundrel came forward to feel Warrener's legs at the risk of his brains—"forty-eight—fifty—fifty-five— — — — eighty—eighty-one. Any advance upon eighty-one? Going! A magnificent-looking horse like that, gentlemen? Ought to win the Liverpool in good hands. Eighty-two guineas. Thank you, Sir. Eighty-two. It's positively giving him away! I never saw a horse so thrown away! Any advance upon eighty-two guineas? Eighty-three. At eighty-three guineas, going! For the last time at eighty-three guineas!" Tap. And Mr. E. Tattersall's hammer fell. "What name, Sir? Grove, Sir? Thank you, Sir."

"It is a pity that you didn't send up one or two of the others with him, if only to buy them in. He would have sold treble as well if he had gone up with the rest of a string," said Ralph.

"I suppose it would have been better; but I literally hadn't horses to spare from the cub-hunting. Morgan was riding my own for want of proper mounts. I can't grumble—I've had two seasons out of the brute, no falls, and sold him for a profit of nearly a 'pony.'"

"I beg your pardon, Sir," said a neat and rather dealer-like looking individual to Ralph, as the trio of cousins were preparing to enter a "growler" at the outside door of the yard; "but could I speak a word? No offence,

Sir; but do you know anything about the chestnut 'oss 107, as was sold just now, as you could tell me or put me up to? I fancied you seemed as if you knew the horse, Sir. I've bought him for a genelman, Sir, not for myself, and was thinking of putting him to steeplechasing maybe."

"Where do you live?" said Ralph laconically.

"Clark, Sir, is my name," producing a card, "and I live at Hornsey, and—"

"Turn his head to Putney Bridge at once, and perhaps you'll get him to Hornsey to-morrow," said Ralph, as he entered the "growler," leaving Mr. Clarke staring in stolid contemplation.





## CHAPTER X.

### MISCHIEF.

**B**Y the aid of Lady Mary and the columns of the *Times*, Jemmy had managed to scrape together *ménage* sufficient for himself, Ruby, and Ralph to inhabit Vale House during the first week of cover-shooting. Jemmy's family-plate, excepting a small supply in his chambers, had been resuscitated from the cellars of Drummonds' and sent to the Vale; but he felt as if he had his pocket picked when his Aunt Mary told him a list of necessities in the way of buckets, brooms, knives, table-linen, crockery, that would not come of their own accord to Vale House. Jemmy groaned in spirit as he began to awake to the onus and horrors of his undertaking, but, jumping at the good-natured offer of his relative to cater for him with her better experience in that line, he shoved a blank cheque into her hands, poured his blessing upon her, and found excuse to run away for the next three days to shoot with Sir J. Marshall.

The selection of butler and footman Lady Mary insisted

on leaving in Jemmy's own hands, and thus they had not yet come into the house as a permanency, though one respectable-looking party of the Baptist persuasion had called one day from Leamington in answer to the advertisement, and had secured Jemmy's best overcoat, a pair of sealskin-gloves, and an umbrella before taking his departure.

As the month of October began to draw to a close and lawn-meets were coming due, yet no gentleman in black had been installed in office, Jemmy became desperate. He anathematised college dons for summoning Ralph and Ruby to *Alma Mater* and leaving him in exile; telegraphed to his valet in town to close his chambers, leave them in charge of "the laundress," and come down to new duties in the Vale; and having set that disgusted gentleman to clean the plate and rule the pantry, chuckled vastly at the economy of the idea.

The one piece of forethought that did Jemmy most credit was that he had laid in a fair and various stock of wine to settle and heal its "sickness" before the end of the first week in September, there being a spare cellar at his immediate disposal. His own appetite, though partial to good things, yet preferred plain cooking of luxuries to made dishes of any sort, so that the cook had so far been called upon to do little more than to grill a haunch of Valehampton venison (which Jemmy refrained to roast, but, with the aid of Ralph and Ruby, got through in detail in the really superior method of grilled steaks cut clean through loin and leg), roast game, devil kidneys, and broil rashers of bacon.

Twice at least in the week Jemmy had taken refuge in

the Maule; but the cares of office soon summoned him back to his bachelor quarters, wherein he slaved like a horse all day, bolted his solitary dinner at eventide, and sneaked off to bed at the first opportunity from sheer *ennui* and satiety of his own company.

It was with a feeling of relief that he received the following epistle on one of the last days in October :

*" Vincent's Club, Oxford.*

"DEAR JEMMY,—Ruby is keener than ever upon Gamecock; nothing that he can get from Symonds seems to suit him. It is a pity that we did not go down to Ellis's when we proposed. However, I have now asked him to send the little horse, that we may try him as much as we like. It is as good as agreeing to buy him to order him to be sent up like that; but if he does not suit Ruby, he will carry me with the drag, though not for a whole day with hounds. I have seen also a likely-looking one at Charlie Symonds' that may suit you if you have not yet filled up all your ranks. He is a young one, by Neville, bred at Chipping Norton. I expect Charlie will want a hatful of money for him, but, if he is as good as he looks, he ought to pay his way and carry you monstrous. Cub-hunting at Bagley on Thursday. Come and try the two; if the hounds don't get away, we can lark on to Kingston Inn. Ruby insists on your coming, or else giving him *carte-blanc* to cater for himself.

"Thine, as usual,

"RALPH ROMILLY."

By 7.30 that said night the three were discussing a

social dinner at the Cross, Oxford. Ruby had begun to settle down in his attic at Merton ; had been guilty of no *lâches* as yet in the way of lectures ; been subjected to no practical jokes ; found daily the usual influx and litter of tradesmen's circulars and cards of junior men upon his table ; paid morning visits with Ralph to the stable in Holywell ; and, jealous of hurting the Lady's legs in blind fences till the legitimate hunting season had begun, had already acquired a fair inkling of the merits of the hack-hunters in Oxford livery-stables.

Ralph and Ruby, though nursed in separate schools and homes, had for years been as inseparable as circumstances would permit. There was a good deal of the uncle as well as of the elder brother in Jemmy's cousinship ; but between the two undergraduates of Merton the gap of three years that usually makes such a difference between a big boy and a little one at school, and carries on the prejudice to maturer years, was no bar to friendship of the highest caste. Ruby was perhaps Jemmy's especial pet in the whole world, unless his change of views and self-examination with reference to Georgie Warren during the spring had of late caused the latter at times to reign uppermost in influence. And Ruby must not be accused of not reciprocating Jemmy's paternal affection, if it be confessed that, had he analysed his own mind and enquired in invidious comparison which of the two entered the more completely into all his thoughts, hopes, and aims, the verdict would have been with Ralph. The latter's natural independence, and Jemmy's easy-going *bonhomie*, placed these two on a par of prestige with each other, completely merging any

claims to superior knowledge of the world that Jemmy's extra nine years might have been supposed to have laid upon his shoulders.

They had come to an end of dinner, and were debating upon the expediency of joining the college "pool," when the parlour-door was unceremoniously thrown open, and a proctor, backed by a leash of bulldogs, stood in the doorway, and then, advancing with a *gaucherie* of which such officials are seldom guilty, asked point-blank for the names and colleges of the three, ignoring the usual opening formula as to whether they were "members of this university." Ruby, with childish cheek, was fumbling for a card-case; Ralph looked as savage as a bear at the intrusion; when Jemmy, with the most winning suavity, broke the silence.

"I have not the honour of your acquaintance, Sir; but you will perhaps allow me to remind you that this is a private room; that you have entered it without leave or invitation. I presume *you* are a magistrate of the university; *I* am a master of arts, and these gentlemen are my guests. I have the honour to wish you a very good-evening.—Charles" (to the waiter), "hold a light upon the stairs.—*Good-evening*, Sir," as the proctor (more strictly a pro) backed out of the room with wholesale apologies.

"Scored one for you, Jemmy," said Ralph. "I am not sure whether you had the law of him by rights; but there's nothing like standing on one's dignity. I must go back to read.—Take him to pool, Ruby, and come for a weed before bed-time." And Ralph lounged off to his lodgings in St. Aldate's.

It was on the morrow, after one of the usual heavy



and unwholesome Oxford lunches, that the horses were led up by helpers to Romilly's door. Jemmy and Ruby had spent an idle morning inspecting Symonds' stud and the stables in general, commenting on the young bay horse by Neville, and inspecting the Lady and newly-arrived Gamecock, who stood in a four-stall stable with three others of Ralph's hunters, at present doing little better than eating their heads off, in a loose-box. Next door stood Baronet—a winner of the Undergraduates' Stakes at Aylesbury, and ridden for them by Ralph a couple of days after the Putney boat-race; a useful sort of horse for "hunters' races," but deficient in speed for anything approaching to handicap duty—by the Duke from some half-bred Yorkshire hunter's dam.

The horse which Ralph had ordered for his own riding that day was Bluster, a big Irish brown, ragged-hipped, broad-loined, up to hosts of weight, and a terrific puller in company—by no means an agreeable horse to ride in a cramped run, but so perfect a fencer, good stayer, and flyer in an open country, and staunch feeder, no matter how hard the day, that Ralph, rather than part with him, was content to go the round of Chifney bits, gag-snaffles, and other patents, finally settling down to a Newmarket snaffle and noseband, as the only thing which inculcated anything like submission.

"We shall be too late for any cub-hunting," said Ralph, as they settled down into the saddles and began to regulate stirrups. "Let's go up Hincksey Hill, anyhow, and if we see nothing we'll strike across to Besselsleigh; there's a farmer there has got a bit of blood or two to sell, and I want to look out for something that has been

tried to jump, to qualify for Aylesbury. Baronet will hardly win again with a stone extra, and I mean to work him a bit in hunters' races when these blessed schools are over."

So they ambled gingerly down the rugged *pavé*, and over Folly Bridge, where Isis looked desolation personified, and through the toll-bar up Hincksey Hill, where they met old F—, the keeper of the drag-hounds, and learnt that the old Berkshire hounds had accounted for a couple of cubs, rattled a ring round Sunningwell after an old one, and gone back to kennels betimes. So they left the high-road, jumping a low blind fence into pasture, Bluster knocking off his master's hat under a tree as he took off, and then pretending to take fright at the fall of the beaver upon his croup, bolting round the whole ten acres before he could be pulled to a standstill. Then they picked their way over two more fences till they struck the footpath and line of stiles, whence it was plain sailing and nice country, past the Old Fox public, behind Sunningwell, across the Cumnor road, through Wootton, and into a line parallel with and close to the main high-road to Kingston Inn—here and there larking over a sheep-hurdle, to the disgust of the shepherd and wrath of the farmer on his cob at the other end of the field; or negotiating the straggling and blind fences that divided the ploughs or stubbles that formed the greater part of their track.

"How does yours do, Ruby?" said Jemmy, when they had crossed about six miles of ordinary fences, without having gone out of their way to encounter anything particularly formidable.

"Very handy indeed—such a nice mouth, throws his hind-quarters up rather, and wants a bit of sitting back."

"Yes, he took you by surprise the first fence, Ruby. You showed a bit of daylight, boy ; but he seems a clean, steady fencer, and if he goes all well to the end of the day we will take him off Ralph's hands."

"I think this young one of mine will do, if Charlie does not want too much for him ; he is a bit eager, and jumps bigger than he need at small places, but he'll get a little more fashion in a month or two."

"Two hundred was his figure last week," said Ralph, who had pulled back to a walk alongside of them, as they crossed a wet, heavy, newly-ploughed stubble ; "but of course that will have to come down about thirty when you come to a deal, provided Wadlow passes him, which I think he will do. Give us a lead, Jemmy, into the road," he continued, as they neared a good-sized but clean-cut stake and bound fence, with evidently a ditch on the farther side, dividing the field from the Kingston-road, but with a nice slip of grass landing between the ditch and the *pavé*.

"No hurry," said Jemmy ; "let's make sure that there are no stone-piles or muck-heaps to land on. I bar falls when there is no need for them."

Then, having satisfied himself that the landing was sound, Jemmy Blake put the "young one" at it in a slow canter, and, topping it cleverly, dropped safe on the turf border just as Bluster, going forty miles an hour at it, cleared a good fifteen feet on the farther side, disgusting Jemmy with a splash of mud between his teeth, as he turned round to see how Gamecock performed. Then,

as soon as Ruby had joined them, they crossed the next fence in search of a well-known line of gates and bridle-path, and within half an hour were picking their way round the muck-yard of Mr. Collis of the Yew-tree Farm.

"Good-morning, Mr. Romilly," said the agriculturist, as he came out of his piggery.—"Service to you, gentlemen," taking off his hat to Ralph and Ruby. "Beautiful mild weather, aint it? Step in and have a glass of wine, if you please, gentlemen."

"With your leave we will presently, Mr. Collis," said Ralph; "but I have come to look at some of your blood-stock, if you have anything of the same class as the last one I bought of you."

"Ah, he turned out well, did he not? I heard of him at Aylesbury, and was glad he did not disappoint you. Yes, sure, I have got two sisters rising four and five, out of a half-sister of Baronet's dam—Oakball, a thoroughbred as she was, and won the Coronation Stakes or something of that sort—by Taurus. I think they're curious, Mr. Romilly, and I'm glad you have come over just now. I was thinking of giving 'em a turn or two at hurdles this afternoon, as I had nothing particular to do, and I shall like you to see them at it."

"Well, we have nearly an hour to spare; but we must keep daylight to go back with, or we shall lose a couple of miles round by the road. I hate fences in cold blood in the dark."

"Yes, sure; I'll have them out in five minutes. Step in, Sir, and have a glass of something." And the trio obeyed, leaving the horses in the hands of farm-servants.

By the time that they had shaken hands with Mrs. and

the Miss Collises—plump, buxom young ladies, who gazed in wonderment at Ruby till even his impudence had recourse to blushes—and had pledged the farmer in a couple of glasses apiece of passable sherry, the young fillies were saddled and mounted by Mr. Collis's two sons, lithe lathy lads of seventeen and nineteen respectively.

"This way, gentlemen," said Collis, leading the way across a four-acre pasture into a half-cleared turnip-field with hurdled enclosures of sheep and roots in various quarters.

The two fillies were much of the same stamp, and bore unmistakable marks of quality. A racing connoisseur might have styled them a little too "coachy" to possess first-class speed on the flat, and their action a little too high, and perhaps unnecessarily tiring for Ascot or Newmarket Heaths; but their long slashing stride, deep girth, well-ribbed-up loins, lengthy quarters, and powerful hocks, stamped them as future weight carriers and no sticklers at dirt, judging by the way in which they each laid themselves out at a hand-gallop through the holding and squelching soil of the turnip-field. Each was a gold chestnut about sixteen hands, with four white fetlocks and star; the only distinction between the four-year-old and three-year-old consisting in the extra development and maturity of the elder sister, and a light splash of silver in the raking tail of the younger.

"Hold hard!" said Collis, as they came round the second time, pulling double and throwing the dirt behind them like catapults. "Take 'em to the hurdles.—You lead first, Bill," to his younger son on the four-year-old.

And the filly, as soon as she saw what was demanded of her, went at the hurdles like a cricket-ball, clearing a good twenty feet, and jumping out of the enclosure on the further side in similar style. The junior followed, tossing her head from side to side from jealousy of losing the lead, covering as much or more ground in her jump, but audibly touching the upper rail each time, and rather wild in her taking off.

"It's only the second time that the young one has seen a fence, Sir," said the farmer; "and the other one has only been showed what to do a few times last spring. Pretty handy, considering, don't you think, Sir?"

"The older one jumps big, and clears a lot of ground, and I dare say the young one will rise a little better in a month or two; but she wants regularly schooling," said Ralph.

"Just what I can't give them here in this heavy land—enough to spring a sinew in young 'osses to jump and gallop them regular in such dirt; yet they're beauties to move in it, they are," continued Mr. Collis, as the two chestnuts came once more round the field, taking the hurdles in their stride in rather improved style.

"Have you ever tried the bigger one at real fences?" said Ralph.

"I showed her the hounds, just to qualify like, at Tar Wood and Tubney, last month, Sir; but the ground was too hard and the fences too blind to do much; but she jumped the big stile as crosses the railway rattling well, she did. I saw that she wanted to follow Treadwell, and wouldn't say her nay. She's got a deal to learn still; but it's my opinion that she's more pace and style nor

ever Baronet had, Sir, and ought to make a better sort all round."

Visions of the Grand National Hunt at Market Harborough and Crewkerne, or wherever was next the rendezvous, flashed across Ralph's ambitious mind; but it did not do to look too keen; so he merely said, holding out his hand,

"Well, thank you very much, Mr. Collis. I think they are rather likely-looking fillies on the whole, though even the elder one is not grown enough to carry me well to hounds just now. However, I will think about them, and shall be sure to be riding this way again within a week.—May we go out this way?" he continued, pointing to the boundary-fence, a low quickset; and receiving an affirmative, he cantered up to Jemmy and Ruby, who had been looking over the hurdles for the last five minutes, and calling them to come on, gave Bluster his head over the quickset, followed by the cousins, and put his head pretty straight for Cumnor.

They had passed Appleton on their left, and were cantering across a stubble-field bounded on all sides by impervious bullfinches, when the buzz of a threshing-machine down wind of them became audible, and almost simultaneously a posse of rustics charged helter-skelter from the cover of some ricks at the lower end; the farmer jogging behind upon a pony, with a gigantic cartwhip in his hands, and his voltigeurs indiscriminately armed with oak-rails, pitchforks, spades, *et hoc genus omne*.

"For'ard, for'ard!" shouted Jemmy, as a couple of rustics made straight for the double-swing gate at the end of the field, the only possible egress, unless they

retraced their steps to the stile by which they had entered.

Ruby had at the first alarm turned Gamecock's head to the fence opposite to that from which the sally proceeded, and picking the only spot through which the least daylight was visible, went at it for his life. Gamecock pricked his ears and charged the thicket at forty miles an hour, but neither he nor Ruby had weight enough to carry their own way; and they had no sooner plunged gallantly into the thick of the fence than two strong binders closed round Gamecock's legs, and a third round Ruby's neck, while the horse, struggling to push his way through, dropped on his knees, his hind-legs still finding purchase on the top of the bank on which the fence grew, but a low rail catching him under the belly, and his loins and whole body behind the saddle gripped tight by strong upright growers that closed together after the first charge. Both Ruby and horse were firmly shackled, and after a struggle or two remained passive and helpless.

"I want two sufferings apiece, or you don't go, you don't!" said the spokesman of the rustics, as Jemmy and Ralph found themselves too late for the gate, which was already seized and held, while another lout hurled a pitchfork at them, that might have broken a leg or disembowelled a horse had it struck direct, but fortunately it did no worse than rebound between the legs of the "young one" and bring him on his nose for a second.

"My good man," said Jemmy blandly, "I know the law better than you; you have no right to stop us; you can have a summons for a trespass, if you like to have



my card. I do not think we have done any damage; but if there has been any, my solicitor can settle it with your master."

"Damages be d——d!" said the rustic, a very unsavoury and uncleanly specimen of the common British clod. "We'll have 'em now, unless so be as you like to bide instead."

"Push up to the latch, Jemmy," said Ralph, seeing that the rustics were running round to secure the defenceless Ruby, and rapidly losing his temper.—"Drop that, you scoundrel!" he continued, as one of the louts seized Bluster's bridle, and another barred the way with a large piece of timber. "You won't!" Then unshipping his stirrup as the man with the rail made a blow at Jemmy, "If you want a row, you shall have one," he continued, regardless of manslaughter, and swinging his weapon down upon the head of the leader of the band, then dropping a smasher upon the knuckles of Jemmy's assailant, he pushed Bluster almost standing at the gate, cutting a third lout over the collar-bone as he came up to it, while Bluster, unable to clear the obstacle, reared up at it, threw his knees and forearm well over the top, and crushing the two upper rails to splinters with his weight, dragged his hind-legs after him uninjured, leaving a clear space for Jemmy, who jumped the remains of the timber and a prostrate rustic, and followed at a gallop to Ruby's rescue.

One rustic had got hold of Gamecock's bridle and was nearly tugging his head off. Another was crawling through a good-sized hare's meuse to attack Ruby from behind, when Ralph reached the spot and commenced operations

by springing off his horse and smiting the creeping rustic viciously with his lash upon the tightened trousers ; then hanging all his weight upon one of the imprisoning binders he so far released the pressure from Gamecock that the horse was enabled to roll head first into the ditch, pinning underneath him the rustic who had been hauling at his head, and leaving Ruby still suspended in binders, till Ralph tucked him under one arm and dragged him to the bottom, just as Gamecock had picked himself up and scrambled out of the ditch. Neither riders lost time in remounting, for a reinforcement of labourers was pouring through the shattered gate, and the report of a gun, and whistle of a handful of No. 6 safe overhead in the bullfinch, warned them that the matter was getting serious.

"Shove on !" hallooed Ralph, still brandishing his disengaged stirrup, while Ruby took the lead at the next fence—a plain stake and bound—Jemmy following, and Ralph, with a feeling of compunction at using such a murderous weapon now that Ruby was safe, took the leather in his bridle-hand, caught the nearest lout two fearful wipes over the face with a Nottingham cutting-whip, dodged his head to avoid a stray pitchfork, and giving Bluster his head was safe with his cousins in a dozen strides.

"It's lucky that none of these beggars have any idea of refusing," said Jemmy, as they pulled up on the roadside after negotiating two more moderate fences. "We should have been up a considerable tree. I hate law-courts and petty-sessions ; and, by George, Ralph, I was afraid it was going to be a case of assizes when you took

off your stirrup! It is a beautiful weapon in a row, but it runs risks of manslaughter: you really should be careful."

"I was a bit cross, I think," said Ralph. "I feared they would begin to maul Ruby; but I was careful after I caught that first fellow on the head, and only went for shoulders and knuckles afterwards. His tile saved that first chap; I saw him pick himself up as you followed over the gate.—Are you damaged, Ruby, my boy?"

"I was horrid near hung, till you came and pulled me out; and I am afraid Gamecock must be full of thorns. I am scratched all round the neck; and his knees will want a deal of picking and poulticing. You're a good lad, Ralph, I must say; how you did hustle those louts! I should like to go over it again."

"Better fun for you than for them, so far; but it would have been very nasty if that gun had peppered us," said Jemmy. "We're very well out of it, I think; and you can have that horse if you like, he seems to go well and handy. It was not every nag that would have faced that bullfinch with so much leaf left upon it."

"What do you think of your own?" said Ralph.

"He'll do at a hundred and fifty," said Jemmy, "with a warranty; I shall not go farther. Did you come to a deal? They seem a nice stamp."

"I am going to look at a young horse at Kidlington to-morrow afternoon, and shall then make a selection. I think the fillies for choice; and if I take one, I may as well have the pair, if they go reasonable."

"It strikes me that we are all going muckers in horse-

flesh ; but they'll be cheap at three hundred the pair, without schooling," said Jemmy. "It's too dark to fence any more, but we may as well jog on."


"I ordered dinner at my lodgings at half-past six ; and took a table at some new billiard-rooms in the High, at eight o'clock, for you two, while I read," said Ralph, as they dismounted in Holywell.





## CHAPTER XI.

MR. BLAKE AT HOME.

OLONEL WARREN had been doing the Lakes with his daughter during October. On his return south it had been arranged that he should at once go to Hungary and use his own personal influence and inspection in reference to some mining-property of his, for the purchase and working of which a company, with imperial sanction, had lately been promoted.

The house on the Steyne was to be let for the winter months, Georgie to be put under the care of Lady Mary, and the colonel to be home in time for Christmas at Orleton.

Thus it was that Georgie and Lady Mary sat *vis-à-vis* at breakfast on October 31st; and the latter said, as she ran her eye over her morning's correspondence,

“Jemmy is getting nervous at his responsibilities, Georgie. He sends for me to come over and help him with his first entertainment, and to spend next week

with him. The first meet is to be at Ashton Grove on Monday, and Sir John gives a large breakfast. Ruby and Ralph are coming from Oxford that morning, and we are all to drive over there by nine o'clock. You must go with me to the Vale on Saturday."

"Me! Jemmy does not expect me—how can I go?"

"My dear child, what can that matter? You and Jemmy are too old friends to stand upon ceremony. Of course, I cannot leave you here by yourself; I shall write and say that you are coming with me."

"But why does he want us—want you, I mean—just to go to breakfast at Ashton Grove?"

"It is more for his own breakfast, which he gives to the meet on Friday; he is afraid of having some failure unless I am there to set it going, and you can be of use to me."

"I will go if you wish it," said Georgie in a tone of resignation, at which Lady Mary looked up in astonishment; "but I think it is not fair that he should make a drudge of you like this; he ought to get a housekeeper."

"Nonsense, Georgie! What is the good of relations if they are not to make use of each other? I wonder at you turning against Jemmy in this way; have you had a quarrel, child?"

"No," said Georgie, as red as a *giant de batailles*; "I was only speaking in chaff. Of course I'll go with you, and help him as much as he wants. I dare say his whole house is upside down already."

"He only came back from Oxford yesterday. He writes that he has been staying with Ralph and buying horses—a new one for Ruby among others. I dare say

he will mount you, if you ask him, at the lawn-meet, if your father does not send your own horse down in time."

"I never ride with hounds, and Jemmy hates ladies in the hunting-field; he says they are only out of place."

"He has been converted, then; he says that Clara Vane has made him promise her a mount on a new horse of his when he was dining last night at Ashton Grove. She is to ride it at the Friday's home-meet, and he is going to put her up for the night if I am there to play *chaperone*. There is the letter. Take care, my dear!" she continued, as Georgie put forth a shaky hand to reach it, and rolled a cup of chocolate liberally over a clean table-cloth.

"I am so sorry," said the culprit, as she did her best to scrape up the mess with a teaspoon. "My hand shakes; I do not think I am quite well this morning."

"That long journey yesterday was too much for you, my dear. Go and keep quiet till lunch, and do not attempt music or anything of the sort; we will drive in the afternoon if you are better."

"I won't go to the breakfast at Ashton," said Georgie. "I know Jemmy has no carriage. I won't ride his strange horses, and he will have no room for me in a dog-cart."

"If you read my letter, my dear, you will see that I am to bring my carriage for that very reason. It is not more than twenty-five miles to the Vale, and we can go over gently on Saturday in time for lunch, if you like. I dare say they will let you have breakfast alone at the Vale if you very much wish it. I must go and give orders for the day," she continued as she left the table;

and Georgie, crumpling the obnoxious letter in her little fist, decamped to her own room, and indulged in the luxury of a good cry. She could hardly, if she had been asked, have defined what it was that vexed her. It was not that she had any horror of encountering the crudities and possible *désagréments* of Jemmy's incipient establishment at the Vale. In a general way, her first impulse would have been to have volunteered her services to aid Lady Mary in getting things ship-shape and smooth for her old friend. But then when she realised the idea of being his guest, and perhaps in that way under an obligation to him, she hung back again. A lawn-meet, a drive to cover, the throw-off, and find, were just the incidents that would otherwise have drawn Georgie more than anything else at that time of year. But now, though the fact that they were Jemmy Blake's hounds served to associate the O.V.H. with an especial interest, she was conscious of a sort of repellent anxiety, a deterrent attraction, that made her more keen to see the meet and more shy of being seen at it.

When Jemmy had in June let the cat out of the bag, and spoken plainly of his hitherto unconscious change of mind and purpose with respect to Georgie, the latter had been so startled, so taken aback at the novelty of the idea, at the change of attitude in one who had hitherto stood to her more in the light of an uncle or extra parent, whom she was privileged to obey and bully at pleasure, that she said no more than the brief exclamation already recorded of her, which Jemmy had tacitly received as a negative, and never alluded again to the subject ; and Georgie had never broached the case to her



father, but had kept her own counsel on the subject; and Jemmy seeing this, and at a loss how for the future to treat her, had been, if anything, distant and neglectful when they had subsequently met. It was this apparent snubbing, or cold courtesy, which piqued Miss Warren. Had Jemmy been as cordial and paternal as ever, it is very probable that Georgie would have been shy and reserved in her manner to him, if only from the consciousness of the new phase in her friendship; but when he seemed, on the contrary, to neglect or keep aloof from her, as if an injured individual, she could not help feeling offended, though relieved and disembarrassed at his conduct. A thorough good cry was the best thing to clear her mind and her temper; and when she came down to lunch, she owned her headache was better, and herself ready to assist in any way in the arrangements of Jemmy's household, and was conscious, at the same time, of novel and strangely-inimical sentiments with regard to her school-friend Clara Vane.

"She could not hunt herself; she did not care for it, and Jemmy did not like it—why should Clara try to be fast, and tease Jemmy into what he disapproved?" thought she. "And Jemmy invited her on purpose, and sent no message that he wanted either Aunt Mary or anyone else, except to make ourselves useful. I have a great mind not to go at all. He does not deserve to be helped."

A cordial note from Jemmy himself to Georgie on Saturday morning — expressing his surprise that Georgie was again in the country, the pleasure it would be to him to see her at the Vale, and his thanks for the proffered

assistance of herself and Lady Mary in his troubles of the ensuing week—upset any remaining artificial scruples of etiquette against a self-invitation that Georgie might have been content to foster, and brought her in a happier frame of mind with herself to the Vale House that day, in time for a cup of tea after the drive of twenty-five miles. Jemmy had the whole pack of hounds at walk at his heels as they drove up; but, leaving them in charge of Dan Morgan, he met them at the door as they landed, radiant with his natural cordiality to his aunt, and a touch of his old paternal patronage as he handed Georgie out of the britzska, helped her to discard wraps and mufflers, and led the way to a roaring fire and social kettledrum in the library.

Tea over, there was an hour to kill in inspection of the house. Jemmy's own sanctum opened into the library, and from its air of habitation rather than of tidiness, carried with it perhaps a greater idea of comfort than any other of the day-rooms. Whips, sticks, spare thongs, and multitudinous spurs clinging to pendent racks; guns, clean, sober, and oily, standing up in a glazed pillory over the fireplace; gloves, boxes of havannahs, and a couple of dog-whips lying on a side-table; a davenport littered with correspondence; a sofa strewn with to-day's edition of the sporting-papers, always excepting *Bell's Life*\*—which, in its then decayed and penny-a-line state of all sport, and more especially aquatics, Jemmy, in

\* These sketches of manners and customs were penned some years ago, since which time *Bell's Life* has passed into new and energetic hands, and none will be better pleased than the author to hear that "*Nunquam Dormio*" has regained its old prestige.

common with many sportsmen, had withdrawn from his catalogue of weekly literature ; two new saddles striding the backs of chairs ; a half-opened parcel of new stirrup-irons ; and on the rug "Yes," the old grizzled terrier from Jemmy's London chambers, made up an average medley of business and evidence of activity as the ladies commenced their inspection. Ordnance-maps of three scales showing the two counties which had their boundaries in the Old Vale hung round the fire-place ; a huge parish-map, six feet square, that Jemmy had picked up at a bargain from a local solicitor of Ashton, stood half unrolled in a corner ; a carefully-compiled table of meets and covers, distance from kennels, and points whither to "send on" hung *vis-à-vis* with his almanack upon either cupboard door. Two good *fauteuils* flanked his hearth-rug, and his slippers stood cosily in a row in a corner. Compared with this den, the other rooms bore a desolate and uninhabited look. The covering was not off the billiard-table. The drawing-room was resplendent in new and gaudy chintz and polished chandeliers, but it bore an aspect at present of show rather than of use. It would do very well for a ball-room, and Jemmy was at once booked to commit himself to a "hop," for a hundred and fifty guests at least, not later than Christmas.

The dining-room was capacious, the mahogany rich in colour, the walls glowering with the cavernous physiognomies of various Monsell dynasties of the Vale. There was an airy breakfast-room, which at Georgie's suggestion should be used for all purposes of comestion, in preference to the gloomy *salon*, whenever numbers did not

exceed half-a-dozen. The bed-rooms furnished ample funds for exploration ; and Georgie was only dissuaded from 'scaling the attic-stairs to the leads, on the plea that it was getting too dark for any view.

The cook was bearded in her own den, and servants' offices thoroughly criticised, before it was time to dress for dinner ; at which the whole force of Ashton Grove—Sir John, his lady, son, daughters, and Clara Vane—were to make an appearance, together with Algernon Paget. The latter announcement rather clouded Georgie's brow for an instant. She had hoped that they were going to have a quiet evening ; and even Jemmy's paternal assurance that he had brought visitors on purpose to amuse her, and thought that she would be glad to meet her friend Miss Vane, failed to reassure her dissatisfaction ; though Jemmy, busy in pioneering and piloting about the chambers, had no time to notice frowns in the increasing darkness.

They came, at last, to a momentary anchor on the antique oak-chairs of the entrance-hall, a good old-fashioned area opening into most of the ground-floor rooms. The polished floor of the same, Jemmy, who had an antipathy to skating, had ruthlessly covered with drugget, having given up his original idea of scraping and sanding it, on the strong representations of Mr. Simms, the agent, who had a taste for the antique, even at the expense of backslidings.

Jemmy had bought a few cords of wood to foster mushrooms, to which he was partial, and to supply at the same time with reasonable logs the high-arched fireplace and its brazen "dogs," that raised a glow through the

centre of the house, and lighted up the shadows of the broad staircase at the farther end.

Georgie had just launched into indignation at the tale of Jemmy's proposed vandalism to the oak-floor, when the roll of wheels and a peal at the front-door flustered the covey and sent them full-speed to their chambers, to make up for lost time and prepare to receive the expected guests.

Jemmy, as he pulled off boots and gaiters in nervous haste to receive his visitors, was relieved to find his door opened by Ralph Romilly, who, having read himself stupid during morning and afternoon, had seized the 5-P.M. train, secured the solitary fly at Ashton, and turned in in time for dinner. Baronet for himself and the Lady for Ruby had arrived at the Vale House early that afternoon. Ralph, who was almost as much a misogynist as Jemmy had been, laid his ears back at the news of the unexpected visitors.

"That was why Marshall made such a bolt for the train that I came by. A batch of women like that are a nuisance anyhow; and he is such a rubbishing fool, Jemmy, I wonder you went out of your way to fetch him down from Oxford."

"My dear fellow, I won't do it again, if you don't like it," said Jemmy, as he finished his ablutions and dived into a clean shirt, hooking the studs in his hair in his haste, and letting off steam with a mild anathema. "Young Marshall was coming up, anyhow, for the Monday's meet, and I thought I ought to do the civil and include him in the invitation. You see they would have had to bring him if he had been at home; so one

might as well have the credit of asking him, don't you see?"

"He would have heard nothing about it if you had not written. He was going to dine with Merriott at the Mitre, and put him off at lunch-time, when I was there just to come to you. I see how it was."

"I feel very much flattered," said Jemmy as he carefully parted his back hair; "I did not know that Jack thought me such good company. He's only a fool, and no knave, Ralph. Don't be rude to him, if you can help it. Look sharp and dress, old boy," he continued; "I was in a funk that you were the Marshalls with a punctual fit. They're overdue now, and you'll spoil the soup. Do go."

"Flattered," thought Ralph as he went to his own quarters—"very likely! I didn't think Jemmy was so soft. Blanche Marshall was sure to split to that fool of a brother when she heard that Georgie was coming here. He must be choked off; she's too good for any such confounded ass."

Ralph had no other feeling for Georgie than that of an elder brother to a pet sister; nor was he likely to mistake his own views and awake to a despairing love-stricken reality, as had James Blake; but the former, for the very reason of his interest in his cousin, was particularly careful as to attentions paid to her by strangers. He would never grudge her the free run of any ball-room, though too lazy to dance himself unless spurred into the thing, but would do his best to pick for her the most eligible partners, both on the score of wits and physiognomy; and it was the same absence of rivalry

that led him thus to a good selection for her in a trivial matter, that made him trebly conscious when he saw, or fancied he saw, an idiot, as he esteemed Jack Marshall, launching himself at the head of his pet.

Nor was Ralph's suspicion unfounded. He knew well enough whose was the lost plain gold locket, for which the high reward of ten pounds had been offered in placards round about Oxford, on condition of its restoration, if found, to "Brown, the marshall." He had picked it up himself one day in the spring, in Symonds' paddock, just after Jack Marshall had cut a clear "voluntary" from a hack whose purchase he had been contemplating. Ralph succeeded in manipulating the secret spring of the bijou, and therein discovered his cousin's physiognomy, cut from a *carte-de-visite* surreptitiously obtained from Silvy. For a day he kept it in his possession, doubting whether he should not send the locket direct to his cousin; but on second thoughts, fearing to annoy her by the accidental betrayal of a secret engagement, if any there could be, or by the knowledge of Marshall's admiration unreciprocated—whichever should be the case, he gave the locket to his scout to make what he could for himself by the reward, and satisfied his own mind, a week or two later, when he met Georgie during the boat-race week, and turned the conversation on Jack Marshall, that her heart was so far intact by Master Jack's adoration.

Ralph felt no better disposed to Jack Marshall, when, on being the last to reach the drawing-room, he saw that ladies were in preponderance by one; and inasmuch as he could only take in one Miss Marshall, and Jack would

be wasted upon his own sister, the latter would have a good chance of shunting Paget upon Miss Vane, and of so being free to devote himself to Miss Warren. Ralph tried to manœuvre Jack into Miss Vane's hands ; but Jemmy was too indolent to go out of his way to dictate to his guests who should lead in who ; and congratulating himself that Lady Marshall's presence saved him from the clutches and gossip of Clara Vane, he took the lead boldly with her ladyship the instant that dinner was announced. Paget was looking down for an instant, to make sure that his boots fitted him, and that Stultz had given the right fall at the knee of his trousers, and so lost the golden opportunity. Marshall, who, though engaged in conversation to the last minute with Lady Mary, had kept his eyes open in the right direction, had crossed like a shot to Georgie's corner ; and though Ralph, in the act of taking charge of Kate Marshall, so timed his steps with a dancing-master's accuracy as to drop, with a brief " Beg your pardon," his twelve stone deftly upon the toes of his antipathy, as the two threaded a circuitous bit of navigation between an ottoman and chiffonier, Jack never flinched or faltered in his stride, and in an instant was at Georgie's side.

It was needless for the latter, as a sort of deputy hostess, to suggest *sotto voce* to Mr. Marshall that he should take Miss Vane, so that his younger sister could go with Mr. Paget, and she herself follow alone. Jack had not sacrificed his corns so unflinchingly for nothing ; and Georgie, to save wrangling, surrendered. Paget, finding himself cut out, led on with Clara Vane, the latter contriving to find two vacant seats at the bottom of the table ;



and everyone seemed satisfied more or less, excepting Paget, who found himself *vis à-vis* instead of alongside of Georgie; and the host himself, who, on seeing who was his left-hand neighbour, groaned inwardly for having chuckled before he was out of cover.

As a matter of course, Jack Marshall had brought his music; and so neither Paget nor he could be persuaded to join in a rubber. When they rejoined the ladies at 9.15, and Jemmy could hardly spare himself to make a fourth with Lady Mary, Ralph sat down to console Sir John at *écarté*.

"Hang that lad of mine!" began Sir John, as the Marshall girls concluded a creditable performance of the overture to *Zampa*; and Jack, on being asked by Lady Mary whether he could perform in any way, did not wait to be asked a second time, but jerked out "If doughty deeds," and detained Blanche for an accompaniment.

"He'll turn all the milk sour, and play the deuce with those mushrooms.—Very good *vol au vent* that just now. Who's your cousin's cook?"

"A new one, Sir John; no *chef*, that I am aware of. Jemmy has been on thorns about her ever since she came. He has never tested her till to-day. He will be delighted to hear that she has found favour in your eyes."

"O, she has much to learn, and so has he; but it is good, very good indeed, for a start. Those cocks were a leetle overdone. I don't hold to the proverb that a woodcock should only see the fire: that is nonsense; but it is sheer ruination to overdo him; and the salad had too much endive. Mr. Blake should mix his own, tell him. I always mix mine—would not trust anyone else."

"Certainly," said Ralph, as Sir John paused for a second.

"And there's nothing like a sprig of scented vervena—sure to be some in the hothouse, even now—to flavour sweetbread; tell him that too. Brown sherry was good too.—Eh? I have done very nicely, thank you. Coffee when it comes—no hurry.—Your deal this hand; I was the last. Lay you five to two on the rub. "Yah! horrible! awful!" as Jack concentrated all his energies upon the "Care he'd take for thy dear sake," and succeeded in varying a good quarter-tone from the original as contemplated by the composer.

Paget meanwhile had got deep into conversation with Georgie, expressed his pleasure that she was coming to see the Ashton-Grove meet, assured her, in answer to kind enquiries, that he had quite recovered from the effects of his shaking in the close of the Maule, and was going to ride a perfect mount of his, a four-hundred-guinea purchase, on Monday, and hoped she would admire it, &c.

Jack Marshall, as the only way to get the young lady away from his rival, came up with a request that Georgie herself would sing, and while Paget looked daggers at the intruder, Georgie hung fire, and seemed unwilling, till a nod and signal from Jemmy sent her to obey; and Jack, following like a spaniel, made himself useful in turning over the pages of Bluementhal's "Requital." Miss Vane had got Jemmy into a corner, and was insisting on having the name of every hound in his pack; Jemmy was looking anxiously at the door for tea to come to the rescue; Paget had fallen back upon Blanche Marshall; Lady

Mary and Lady Marshall were discussing the characters of servants and the needfuls for a public hunting-breakfast, which was rather beyond the details of Lady Mary's experience; Georgie was pondering between the bars of the symphony what Jemmy and Miss Vane could be talking about, and thinking that she wondered how she could have liked the latter so well in her school-days; and Sir John had just lost the long odds and the rubber to Ralph, when Soames, the valet, rapidly entered the room and informed his master that a little girl wished to see him, and he was afraid there was something the matter with the hounds.

Jemmy, too thankful for any ordinary mischief that could grant him temporary respite from his tormentor, made a hasty apology, and securing a pot-hat, pea-jacket, and double-thong as precaution, went to the servants' hall. There he learnt from the blubbering lips of a little daughter of Dan Morgan's that the "hounds had eat the new whip, surely — and that mother was afraid they weren't satisfied neither, for they was a-howling awful."

It flashed across Jemmy's mind that he had given leave to Morgan, and the first whip, and Peter Mell to attend some conjuring entertainment that evening in Ashton, and that this new whip had been so reckless as to enter the kennels without a thong to protect himself. He felt queer, and nearly repudiated the dinner, which, upon the whole, he had enjoyed, notwithstanding the cares of office, as he pictured the wretched whip throttled, dismembered, and already entombed in the maws of the pack; but he was speedily on his way, having first heard, to his partial consolation, that Lady Mary's coachman, his own under-

grooms, and Sir John's also had set off to the rescue as soon as the first alarm was raised.

It was with a feeling of deep relief that he met in the moonlight as he crossed the main-road, the whole posse of stablemen escorting the missing whip, still in the flesh, but rather mangled in one calf and decidedly tattered about the breeches. On the whole, he had been more frightened than hurt, and soon blubbered out to the effect that the hounds had been fighting, and that he had gone in the dark to separate them, and dropped the whip. Old Forester went slap at his throat; he managed to thrust him off, and, clutching the palisades for dear life, scrambled like a cat to the top, leaving a gaiter and small portions of his calf in the jaws of Caterer; but gaining the summit in safety, whence he would have securely dropped to the outside, but that some envious nail or projecting spike hooked the stout cord of his breeches as he slid down backwards and suspended him, with the cold and hungry noses of the hounds sniffing and baying, through the palisades at his person for some ten minutes, till old Owen and the rest arrived to the rescue.

All was well that ended well, and the narrative formed ample funds and diversion for gossip, till carriages released Jemmy from his duties and left him breathing-time with his cousins.

"To-morrow is the first Sunday in the month, Jemmy," said Georgie, *sotto voce*, as she came to say good-night; "and Aunt Mary and I want to go to the eight-o'clock service before breakfast; it is only half-a-mile — do you mind our going?"

"What, for morning service? O yes; I know Go

by all means if you like. We'll wait breakfast for you ;" then, as Ralph had strolled into the hall to light bed-candles, he added, "If you like, I will come with you myself. Good-night, child ;" and went meditatively to bed instead of keeping Ralph company over a weed and night-cap.





## CHAPTER XII.

### ASHTON SPINNIES.

“**F**OR mercy’s sake lets get out of this!” said Jemmy to Ralph so soon as he had swallowed a bloater and kidney, been roused to his legs to speak for himself and the O.V.H., stammered his thanks and apologies in a brief yet not unbusiness-like manner, and finished off matters with a glass of curaçoa. “I must have a weed to settle me down before we get away; come on down to stables;” and, regardless of anxious signals from Miss Vane and pressing invitations from his host and hostess to try a little of this and a little of that, Jemmy slipped his arm into Ralph’s and picked his way to the door.

The dining and breakfast-rooms of Ashton-Grove were crowded with some seventy men in hunting-dress of all denominations. The dandy pink, the workmanlike pink, the seedy pink, the clerical black, the retiring black, the sporting pepper-and-salt, the invalid or undress-gray of a

hunting-man on the shelf or in mufti for the time being ; heavy-weights, light-weights, middle-weights, schoolboy feather-weights, hippopotamus welter-weights ; men who meant to go, and did go ; men who as invariably meant to go, and didn't go when they came to the scratch ; men come to look on ; men who made it their duty to themselves and their families to look before they leapt, and run no undue risks to themselves or their dependants. Some half-a-dozen ladies in riding-skirts : the two Misses Maddox, daughters of Tom Maddox of the Jockey Club, owner of a well-known breeding stud in the southern end of the Vale, and of a string at Jeffrey's stables on the Yorkshire downs, where, amongst that string, daily took his gallop Imperial, reigning favourite for the next year's Derby. Withered and hardy Mrs. White, who imperatively kept the old major, her spouse, at home, unless, on occasions like these, he was suffered to drive with her to cover. Mrs. White, who was the bugbear of every stickler and craner in the O.V.H., always thereabouts with the hounds, never especially in anyone's way in a strong run, quite capable of taking care of herself and of generally pounding the groom who nominally accompanied her, but fond of accidentally giving the lead to muddlers who hung back, and of telling them that "it is nothing when you're over it," as she leered at them from the further side of the obstacle ; whose ill-faur'ed harriidan face was proof against brambles, case hardened to snow and hail, and never bereft of a grin of self-satisfaction. Mrs. St. Paul, a fast and golden-haired widow, lately resident with her brother, the Rev. George Peronet, the ritualistic incumbent of Hubbard-on-Lyne ; and two Miss Marriotts,

under convoy of their grandsire, Sir William Marriott, K.C.B., suffered by him to attend the meet as spectators, but in no wise to go beyond the throw off. And on the slope of the part across the ha-ha were fast congregating farmers, butchers, grooms, and loungers leading horses, a cheesemonger from Orleton, a couple of rival "vets.," a sporting publican or two, two or three gentlemanly-looking strangers, and the inevitable and rheumatic Farmer Dodd and lad in his gig.

Rain had fallen moderately in the night ; the grass was moist and fragrant ; two or three sharp white frosts during the past week had nearly cleared the fences of straggling foliage ; the soil was rather holding and squelching ; wind S.W., breeze light, and sun shining brightly through fleecy beds of cirro-stratus.

The outside crowd began to bestir themselves as the servants of the establishment came forth with ale-tankards, spirit-glasses, and snacks of pork-pie or sausage-roll, which Sir John was fond of purveying indiscriminately on such occasions. Then presently there was a buzz, as Dan Morgan jogged round from the back premises with a level, twenty-five-inch, average mixed pack of eighteen couple ; the whips sedately bringing up the rear, and all resplendent in new pinks and plush collars.

Then there was a general exodus from the house ; grooms bringing hunters up the drive to meet their masters, cramp-loined heavy-weights mounting judiciously with aid of the portico-steps, the Maule britzska rolling up to escort Lady Mary Blake and Georgie Warren to the Moorfield cross-roads, whence they were safe to get a bird's-eye view of the probable line taken



down the Ashton water-meadows, presuming that they should find for certain in the Ashton spinnies.

Then Jemmy, Ralph, Ruby, and Paget came jogging round, also from the backway, in the track of the hounds; the new M.F.H. — the cynosure of all eyes, and centre-piece of all tongues — capped and good-morninged wholesale to bewilderment by the multitudinous strangers around him. But Mr. Blake soon rescued himself from the ordeal; and on the arrival at his side of Sir John, on a massive and elephantine weight-carrier, with gorgeous deep-sloping shoulders, back-ribs like a whale, and quarters like a dray-horse, the master gave Dan Morgan the “office,” and they jogged to the spinnies, at the upper end of the park, the cavalcade spreading leisurely over the turf; some here and there larking over a sheep-hurdle, or stray draindyke that led down to the lake; some gossiping; some tightening girths; some trying all sorts of lengths of stirrups. Horses, too, of all denominations. Thoroughbred weeds, and a few thoroughbred weight carriers; half-bred knackers, and half-bred hunters cheap at three figures; raw four-year-olds, and seasoned twelve-year hunters; restive plungers in the hands of breakers and rough-riders, and staid old staggers conscious of the precious burden of *patres familiarum*; butchers’ ponies, and rough-coated, shamble-kneed cobs, just up from grass; a couple of cast-off flat-racers, now studying the “country” under Ellis, the steeplechase trainer, sent out to see the hounds and “qualify” for hunters’ races; and last, not least, the leading cavalcade, consisting of Sir John on his elephant, Jack Marshall on a neat-looking importation from Vine’s,

Jemmy on the Sister to Cooksboro, and Baronet and the Lady for Ralph and Ruby.

"Hoick, in there!" said Dan, as he came round to the north end of the upper spinney, and sent the hounds tumbling and dashing through the underwood and briers to the lower end, without evoking the slightest challenge and whimper.

"No go, that!" said Sir John to Jemmy; "but they work steady, seemingly; no riot among the younger entries."

"Better luck in the next," said Jemmy, as Dan, without need to draw his horn, trotted down to the lower spinney, and threw his hounds in at the nearer end.

"There go the British public! will spoil their own sport, of course!" said Ralph, as some fifty horsemen followed an indefinite leader at a canter through a gateway, so as to be the safe side of the first fence in case the fox should go away at once for the open; whereas, if he ran the ring of the park, they would have ample time to retrace their steps and join the rest of the field.

"Hark!" said Sir John as they stood still under the dingle fence.

"Found, by George!" said Jemmy, as the whimper rose to a challenge.

"All right!" said Ralph, as the challenge became a duet.

"Tally-ho!" yelled some on in front at the head of the group in the next field, as the duet swelled to a chorus.

"Deuce!" said Sir John in the next breath, as the chorus hushed for an instant at the further side of

the cover, and a whip's "Tally-ho, back!" explained matters.

"At him again!" said Jemmy, standing up in his stirrups, as the chorus reopened again at the lower end, and was coming towards them.

"Back a little, eh, Jemmy?" said Ralph; "or we shall be heading him."

"Gone back in again, Dan?" said Sir John, as that functionary took the boundary fence out of cover at a stand, and landed beside them.

"Like enough, Sir John; with a pack o' fools a-stinking over there up-wind of him;" indicating with his elbow the expectant crowd over the next fence, at the head of which, resplendent in a new pink, sat Jack Marshall.

"Gone awa-a-a-y!" hallooed Ned Masters from the east side of the cover, standing still and holding up his hat.

"Straight for the decoy!" said Sir John, as they viewed the fox sailing away down the gully side.

"Hold hard, if you *please*, gentlemen!" sung out Dan, as everyone made a rush for a gateway in a line of four-foot timber.

"Hounds first, if you please, Sirs," said Jemmy, gathering courage and importance as the pack streamed over the boundary fence and raced down the slope, within a few yards of the gateway.

"Toot, toot!" went Dan's horn as he shoved his horse at the rail, followed by Ralph; and Jemmy, finding the block in the gateway impassable, turned round and followed suit; in his rear Ned Masters, on a long-legged four-year-old that hit it hard all round, and some four or five other impatient.

Through the swamps and osiers of the decoy, half-a-mile below, the pack rattled their fox, unkennelling a brace of others as they made the hill and waterside echo to the music, but sticking well to the line of their own first find.

"Gone away!" hallooed old Dodd in his gig from the top of the rising ground, as the fox, stealing a march in the rather cold-scenting swamp, got well away under the slope of the hill; and running a ring round the park, close in front of the lawn, as if for the benefit of the ladies, made good his first point across the Ashton road.

"Hold hard! hold hard!" said Dan, as the field of a hundred and a half, who had kept well together in the open pastures of the park, poured *en masse* at the gateway just as the hounds threw up their heads on the further side of the next fence.

"Boy with the pigs," said Mr. Blake, as he pushed his bay mare nearly standing at the straggling fence and landed alongside of Dan on the bean-stubble.

"Right you are, Sir!" said the huntsman, as the hounds spread to their own cast, and in a few seconds Jezebel had it at a meuse under the opposite hedgerow, and the pack flew to her tongue.

"Forrard! forrard!" sang out the mob behind, who waited for satisfactory gaps to be forced in the fence out of the road.

"He is making for Whortle Woods," said Jemmy, as Ralph ranged alongside of him in a big pasture about two miles and a half further on, and a dozen minutes after Jezebel had led through the meuse.

"Here come all the roadsters!" growled the latter, as

the hounds bore to the left on the next two fields, and crossed a bye-road —along which in the rear clattered some fifty macadamisers—and raced down a muddy blind lane to a long belt of plantation, at the lower end of which flowed a moderate brook. The fox's line ran up along the belt for a hundred yards or so, till a tinker setting springes in the underwood had turned him once more to the open pastures.

By the time that the hounds had threaded the plantation, till they momentarily checked where the tinker had turned the fox, some fifteen of the leaders had reached the bottom of the muddy lane. Dan plunged into the plantation to his hounds, but ere he was with them, Forester had hit the line, and the pack streamed away over the water-meadow.

A gate, at the foot of which flowed in a ford the brook which threaded the plantation, blocked the end of the lane down which the whole hunt was fast pouring. Six-barred, cross-laced with "kids" or pea-sticks, and water beyond it, it looked anything but a handy jump for anyone. Dan had just pushed through the rather rotten fence that bounded the plantation and jumped the water-ditch at a stand.

Farmer Green essayed to open the gate, and found it double-chained and nailed.

Ralph, plunging into the plantation close by, pushed up to the fence, found it too stiff on his quarter to push through, too hidden in rubbish and underwood for a horse to see it if he backed to take a run at it. Dis-mounting, crushing it down with his boot, and starting a little daylight through twigs and dead nettles, he again

put Baronet at it, who got over it, but dropped his hind-legs in the brook beyond and rolled over with him. The two or three behind, Jemmy included, who were awaiting the benefit of Ralph's pioneering, had to wait till he had got himself clear; for Ralph, first come, first served, had secured the only practicable place within range. Meantime, at the same moment that Ralph had made for the plantation, Farmer Green and a pal had dismounted and brought their stirrup-irons vainly to bear, hammer and tongs, upon the double chains which ran clean round the gatepost, and offered no staple or weak point to attack.

"Out of the way, Turnips!" sang out Ruby, hemmed in on both sides by reeking cavalry, and only one egress available.

"Clear out, there, and let the gentleman come, if he's a mind," said two or three who thought that the timber might prove more fragile than the iron.

"What on earth is the use of that?" exclaimed young Shortbread, of the firm of Shortbread and Co., haberdashers, of Tottenham-court-road, as Ruby caught the Lady tight by the head, and went with a rush at the bush-twined gate—the little mare going at the obstacle with a will, splashing mud right and left as she went down the lane, hitting it with a hind fetlock as she went over like a buck, fairly clearing the sloping bank and loose stones of the ford at the bottom of the gateway, and staggering all over the place as she landed.

"Sich waste! to send a hinfant and powney to break timber — poof! — aint nobody got never a cart-colt handy?" sputtered Farmer Green, raking a clot of mud out of his teeth with his little finger, while the Lady, after

skating and scrambling along the short wet grass for some thirty yards, settled down once more safe upon her legs, and was off forty miles an hour over the water-meadows.

"Let us have a try now, will yer?" hallooed Ned Masters, bringing the four-year-old rather slowly up to the gate, and holding his head like a rock, dead-straight at it.

The young one was game, if not quite competent, and rearing well up, laid his whole chest on to the top rail, bringing the best part of the structure down with a smash, dragging his hind-legs clear of the *débris*, and indulging in two or three rattling kicks at two or three over-eager followers who pressed at once to the opening, keen to follow the results of Ned's pioneering.

Meantime, a mile farther back, Jack Marshall, in the safe pursuit of pleasure, so far as compatible with macadamising action, had suddenly espied, a quarter of a mile ahead of him, the Maule carriage, waiting on the rising ground of Moorfields cross-roads, to snatch, if possible, a glimpse of any run that might cross the Moorfield pastures. Nor had they been disappointed. Right below them at that instant, some half-mile distant, the Old Vale pack, in close order, were holding a good head upon a hot scent over the water-meadows of Moorfields. Some three or four pink and black coats in the next field to them, another eight or ten riders pretty handy, some a little wide on the farther side, some following the tracks and gaps of the leaders, a couple of dozen riders, headed by Sir John Marshall, essaying a short cut through gateways to Whortle; a long line following helter-skelter, through gaps and gateways, over a stretch half a mile back; and a goodly brigade of road-hunters, clattering

along out of a gateway and into the Moorfield-lane, some three hundred yards below the carriage. Half a mile or more in front of the hounds loomed the dark plantation already mentioned.

Jack Marshall had, in certain cases, a large amount of wits about him. In the present case he had made up his mind in a very few seconds after the carriage broke upon his view. There was, he thought, but little choice in the matter. True, his knowledge of the country had made him take the upper road in question, from an inkling that the fox would make for the big woods six miles off, and a little to the right, if he could hold his own line; but it now dawned upon him that the road swung over too much to the right, that no friendly gateways were visible, the blackthorn fences of Moorfields stiff and uninviting, the ditches deep and disagreeable, the hounds too far ahead already for him to hope to overtake them. His plan of action was short and simple: in an instant he had unshipped his off stirrup-leather, slung it over the right-hand fence, under shelter of a large haystack, and bumping painfully and lopsidedly in his saddle as he pulled Perfection from his canter to a slow jog, he ranged up to the britzska, and, bowing low, wished to know if he could be of any use to the ladies.

Georgie's counter-query as to why he was not with the hounds was explained by pointing to the loss of the "broken" leather, which had given way a little distance back, much to Mr. J. Marshall's disgust.

"Can't you go on without it, Mr. Marshall?" said Georgie. "I thought that all good riders could manage almost as well without stirrups as with them. I know



my Cousin Ralph won a race this year at Aylesbury after he had broken his stirrup the first time round."

But Mr. Marshall's horse was one that "required a good deal of handling and management, more than the best man in the world could give with only one stirrup ; such one-sided work ; better no stirrup than only one."

"You can leave the other with me, Mr. Marshall, if you like," volunteered Lady Mary in her sweetest tones. "We will leave it for you at your house as we drive back ; and then you will be evenly balanced, as you say."

"It is a very different thing, you know, riding over a steeplechase-course without stirrups, where all the fences are easy made-up ones—nothing that a horse cannot jump, if he's worth anything—from going straight in a blind, stiff country like this, I am afraid I must give it up ; it is a bad job, but for the good fortune"—glancing at Georgie—"of falling in with you in this way."

And then, as the hounds had disappeared into the plantation belt, and the majority of the field in the deep, high-hedged, muddy lane above described, Lady Mary suggested that they should drive a little farther along the ridge of upland, so as, if possible, to catch a view of the field and pack again, should they emerge on the farther side of the strip of trees which now hid them.

So the britzska proceeded, Jack Marshall bumping piteously alongside, ever and anon taking sly props from the pommel to save the concussion of Perfection's really smoothgoing trot, till Lady Mary took pity on him again, and signalling to old Owen to pull up his horses, offered Jack a seat inside, if he liked to surrender his horse to the Maule footman on the box.

Nothing could have been more auspicious, no man in the world better pleased with himself and his ruse than Master Jack, as he took the precaution to unbuckle his sandwich-case and sherry-flask, that he might have excuse for offering refreshment, and persuading the ladies to drive on elsewhere, and delay their return till after luncheon-hours. Then wrapping himself in a mackintosh, that veiled from curious eyes the gaudy tones of his new pink, he leant back *vis-à-vis* to Georgie, supremely happy with himself and the world.

But not less happy than he, each in his own way, a select few were then sailing down the water-meadows of the Slate-brook at a pace that would have done credit to the lady pack in the most open pastures of the Pytchley.

Ruby and Dan Morgan had got a clear start of the rest of the field from the strip of plantation below Moorfields, Morgan a good hundred yards in front, and nearer at first to the hounds ; but in a field or two farther on the line of the fox swung round sharp to the left, towards Ruby, so as to nearly meet the edge of the brook, which again curved to the right ; and then the fox, for a distance of a mile or more, had pursued a course exactly parallel to the stream, which, under a system of modern high-farming, had been led in a dead-straight artificial channel to save the waste land of the winding course that nature had formerly taught.

Dan had lost ground by the sweep of the hounds, now running due east ; a footway over the water-meadows, with easy stiles in each fence, ran close handy to the line of the hounds, not a dozen paces from them, and for some

way no wayfarer was visible to turn the head of the varmint.

Dan was a good horseman at twelve stone, and well mounted ; but it was as much as he could do to hold his own at the pace they were running, with scent breast-high, hounds mute and compact as a tablecloth, all but a brace of stragglers, one a young one, the other trodden and lamed in the first crush in the park gateway. To overhaul the Lady, who carried no more than ten stone seven at the outside, and was as thoroughbred as Blair Athol, was asking too much of the rat-tailed bay that was going so gallantly under Morgan. Two fields behind, Baronet was doing his best to make up Ralph Romilly's lost ground ; Jemmy was shoving Sister to Cooksboro along at a creditable pace ; and one of Ellis's stable-lads, reduced from nominal to real qualification upon Garrygowan, winner of the Punchestown Hunt Cup, was close handy. The first whip was alongside of him, and the second had been cropped in coming in Ralph's track out of the plantation, and was invisible.

A certain Captain Starkey, on a neat-made bay, fired on both fore-legs ; Mrs. Major White, glancing beacon-like upon a thoroughbred gray ; Ned Masters, who had already twice saved the four-year-old when down on his ears ; and a couple of strangers of a cavalry cut, well mounted, and just down for the season at the Hand and Sceptre,—were each and all doing their very best to keep within calculation of the fast-receding pack.

The fox, a game but decidedly gorged one, had found even the five miles or so that had been covered a little too hot for him, and it was not his fault that presently a

little girl and old woman, hobbling and helping over a hog-backed stile, caused him to check short and cross the Slake, not a couple of fields in front of the pack, as they hung for a second at a hedgerow.

Ruby viewed him as he slipped into the stream, and emerged dragged, muddy, and panting on the farther side, to set off hopelessly again on his weary way, and to trail his dirt-clodded brush heavily on the wet grass.

Raising his voice to his best attempt at a view-halloo, Ruby capped the pack towards the place of crossing, and Dan—to his credit be it said—so far from being jealous of the lead of the golden-haired baby in a gray shooting-jacket and “pot”-hat that had been cutting down the whole field, and eager to give a good account of his first fox, backed him up with a cheery “Hark, halloo ! Hark, halloo !” and with a crack of his whip sent the whole pack flying to the cry.

The turn to the left over the water let in somewhat Ned Masters and one or two who had followed him through the broken gate out of the lane. Ruby was first over the water, and had still a clear lead of a ten-acre field, when Dan, Ralph, and Jemmy took it pretty well in a line, Sister to Cooksboro landing her off hindleg in a rat-hole, and putting herself and the master to earth. Mrs. White, not far behind, nearly jumped over him as he picked up the pieces ; and one of the cavalry-officers met with a refusal, and was not able to persuade his beast to face the water, until some twenty of the line-followers had come up, charged, taken to or shirked the new element, according to circumstance and fancy. The fox could not last many minutes farther at the pace. After

five more fences he tried a couple of short doubles under the hedgerow, that by fortuitous circumstances were still more in Ruby's favour, and then, as the poor persecuted varmint made one more effort, and pushed gamely across a twenty-acre meadow, at the end of which some ricks and farm-buildings might afford him an off-chance for his salvation, the scene changed from scent to view, and while his wearied limbs could scarcely lift him over the wet hummocks of "feg" and thistle, Forester, Jezebel, and May Queen led the race up to him, and, within fifty yards of the rick-yard, he gnashed his teeth in despair as he felt their hot breath fanning his flanks, and then turned short to bay, fighting and snapping silently and grimly to the last, as the leaders closed upon his throat, and the rest rushing in gripped and shook the remaining breath from his gasping carcass.





## CHAPTER XIII.

### SECOND HORSES.

**T**HEN Ruby, giving the Lady her head, charged up to the worrying pack, ecstatic at his claim to his first fairly-earned brush, and, heedless of the risk so recently run by the second whip on Saturday night, dropped the little mare's rein so soon as he could jump off, and recklessly forcing his way into the hounds, set to flog them off their prey.

Fortunately for him the pack were for the instant deeply engrossed with the still palpitating body of the varmint, and Dan, who was scarce a hundred yards behind the boy as they entered the last field, galloped up with a "Have a care, young master! Have a care there, egad!" and in a few seconds had taken the matter into his own hands, and held up aloft the limp and muddy remains of a fine dog-fox; while his who-o-op! gave notice on the other side of the fence to Ralph Romilly and the rest of the leaders, of the end of all things for the present.

"About thirty minutes altogether from the find," said

Ralph to the master, looking at his watch, as the two dismounted to wait for the obsequies ; "and I suppose about four miles as the crow flies—a good two miles more than that, the way we came."

"Pretty fast those two last miles or so, after that bit of cover," said Jemmy. "I am afraid I saw very little of the hounds after you went down in front of me coming out of it ; they got clear away, and my mare put me down too at that water. That old cat," he continued, pointing to Mrs. Major White, tucking up the scraggy remains of her back-hair, and sitting loosely on her gray, whose stretched neck and heaving flanks showed that the pace had been rather too hot for his condition in the first week in November, "precious nearly did for me ; came slap at me when I was down, and landed on my hat, hang her ! Women have no business in the hunting-field ; they always get in the way, and you can't slang them as if they were men."

And Jemmy took off and contemplated the tatters of a brand-new, low-crowned Chapman and Moore, built new for the season, and indelibly stamped with the mark of the beast that had so well carried Mrs. Major White. The fact was, that Jemmy's usually placid temperament had been ruffled not so much by the destruction of his beaver, as by seeing himself headed by a petticoat after his fall. It was only by the happy style in which Sister to Cooksboro had negotiated a five-barred gate, with a balking footboard leading up to it, two fields from the kill, while the major's wife was tearing her hat and habit clear of a huge loose thorn-bush that she had dragged into the middle of the field from the parallel bullfinch,

that he was enabled to regain his ascendancy and lower his colours on his first appearance as master of the O.V.H. to none but his two cousins and his huntsman.

"That young sinner had it all to himself for the last half so far as I could see," said Ralph, pointing to Ruby, who was carefully picking a thorn out of the Lady's knee.

"He has earned his first brush, and shall have it," said Jemmy, who had rather fostered the idea of giving his first spoils to Georgie, but would not for a second defraud Ruby of his due so signally won.

Close behind the cousins and Mrs. White had come in the other "plunger" and first whip, and Captain Starkey. Garrygowan had twined his fetlocks in a stiff binder, and broken his jockey's collar-bone, to the great detriment of the stable in the forthcoming steeplechase season. Ned Masters had at last succeeded in cropping the four-year-old, in attempting to follow Jemmy over the gate that put the latter once more on terms with Mrs. Major White; but he entered the winning field before dismemberment was complete, in company with some four or five other fairish goers of the Vale, generally thereabouts all the season, but whose cattle had not the pace or caste sufficient for such an exceptionally fast bit of racing as the last eight or nine minutes had shown.

"A very pretty forty-five minutes," said Algernon Paget as he entered the pasture through an improved gap on the other side of the enclosure between the haystacks, just as Tomboy and Trumpeter were tugging and growling over the last visible morsels of loose skin from the "scruff" of the fox's neck; "one of the fastest things



that I have seen this many a year," as he loosened his girths, and wiped his forehead, which was in high perspiration from the exertion of holding his horse to a more moderate pace that enabled him to pick his way with greater safety.

"I did not think it was quite so long," said Ralph drily; "I made it hardly any more than half-an-hour: are you sure you are correct?"

"Half an hour? impossible, my dear fellow! Hounds and horses could not do such a thing; it is at least seven miles as the crow flies, and we must have gone another three out of our road. No, I assure you I timed it all the way from the find to the end here."

So Ralph fished for his sherry-flask, and gave up the point; and then the thirty or forty horsemen, who had by now congregated, followed Jemmy and his huntsman to Whortle Covers and Common, where those who had provided themselves would fall in with their second so horses, the master exchanging Sister to Cooksboro for the new bay from Symonds', now known as "Pioneer."

Mr. James Blake felt very well pleased with himself so far, as he jogged down a ride of Whortle Wood parallel to the line which Dan and the hounds were drawing.

It was not many minutes before a find was proclaimed; but it was a good half-hour ere the fox, a bad faint-hearted one, could be persuaded, after ringing three times the entire range of the woods, to set his face for the open.

By that time those who had ridden with anything like honesty or intent to the first run, and had since kept on the move more or less from point to point of the deep claying rides, till the cheery voice of the first whip pro-

claimed that the sneak had at last "gone away," had taken decidedly the best polish off their horses for the day.

However, some thirty or forty were handy at Dan's heels, as he rapidly hallooed his hounds out of cover and clapped them to the line where the fox had crossed the first fallow.

The rush of the field down a couple of rides had prevented the fox from again doubling into cover on the other side of his first fence, as he had at first attempted, and Dan, cheering his hounds to the scent not three minutes in his rear, soon made him stretch his legs, already none the lighter for draggling in the soaking greasy cover, and set his head for the open.

So he led them, at a moderate but not outrageous pace, a couple of miles pretty straight, to Elsted dingles; through which the mixed pack rattled him merrily, and forced him out to make for shelter in the gorse-bushes of Neville's Heath, another mile off; then back again he broke, close to his old line, for Elsted; but being coursed by a mischievous sheep-dog as he crossed the Ashton road, he turned sharp to the left, and notwithstanding his gain of three or four minutes' law, by the check engendered by the sheep-cur's interference, he made no farther than Farmer Stone's rickyard, in Little Elsted; and there lying down to hide himself in a cartshed, died like a craven.

It was just the sort of run that suited the majority of subscribers to the O.V.H.; not that many of them would point-blank have so confessed, or have had the candour to express their dislike of a steeplechase-gallop, such as

the morning run, which was too fast for nine-tenths or more of them to see or even hear anything of the hounds, or indeed to trace or follow in any way save through the gradual line or medium of the "tail;" but they fully appreciated a run such as that of the afternoon, of which the pace was exhilarating, yet not heart-breaking, sufficiently accommodating to allow some five and twenty to maintain their pride of place at a hand canter, within an average range of an enclosure's distance from the hounds, and yet have time and space, with the aid of short cuts, friendly checks, and delays in cover, to seek convenient gaps and gateways, when extra timber or unusually stiff-planted fences enviously barred the more direct line of the hounds.

Nothing could be more cordial and congratulatory than the valedictions of the assemblage as Dan drew off the hounds, well-filled with blood; and Mr. Blake, doffing his hat, informed his company with urbanity that he should not draw any more that day.

"Capital day's sport!"—"First-rate beginning!"—"Never saw hounds better handled in my life, Sir!"—"Wish you all success, squire!"—"Hope we shall have many such days' sport, Sir!"—"A 1 turn-out, and rattling good sport, Mr. Blake!" And similar compliments and benedictions made Mr. James Blake hug himself in satisfaction, as he jogged along a bridle-path to the north of Moorfields, contemplating the second brush, which he had reserved for Georgie, and grudging that it was not the trophy of a gamer fox.

"What on earth is the meaning of that? Look, Jem!" exclaimed Ralph, as the Maule carriage drove into the

Moorfields cross-roads, not a couple of hundred yards in front of them, and pulled up at the side to wait for them.

"Eh? they're late out! I thought they were to have been home for lunch," said Jemmy obtusely.

"Late! I don't mean that; look at that idiot; how did he come there?" intimating Jack Marshall, whose seventh heaven of felicitation seemed, to judge by his countenance, rather abased by the inopportune arrival of the M.F.H., his cousins and belongings, who jogged up for a few seconds' gossip.

"We have had a most delightful drive," began Miss Vane, "forty miles an hour; and we saw the hounds running, and the horses jumping so well down below there—two or three hours ago I think it was, Mr. Blake; and I think I saw you too—I am sure I knew the shape of your hat;" pointing to Jemmy's ruined Chapman and Moore.

"I hope you had a good day," said Lady Mary. "I am sorry to say that poor Mr. Marshall spoilt his sport quite early, by breaking his stirrup-leather; we met him just here, and took compassion on him, and sent John home with his horse. We have been hunting on wheels ever since; but we have not seen anything much of the hounds, only a few red and black coats here and there in the roads."

"Horrid bore, wasn't it?" said Master Jack confusedly. "Such hard lines! and I had got a good start, and the bay horse was going beautifully. Just my luck! I suppose you had rather a good thing?" Hoping with all his heart that there had not been a breath of scent after the Moorfields plantation had hidden the hounds from view.

"We had a very pretty thirty minutes of about half-a-dozen miles," said the master, addressing himself to Georgie and Lady Mary rather than the two former speakers; "and young Ruby here cut us all down by a good field at the finish; we all feel quite small alongside of him now." While Ruby blushed up to his golden hair, and dismounted to search for imaginary stones in the Lady's feet.

"Mr. Marshall's horse has, I expect, gone on to the Vale House with John; so I have taken upon myself to ask him to take pot-luck there before he rides home this evening."

"Very glad indeed to see you, Mr. Marshall," said Jemmy with urbanity. "I am exceedingly sorry to hear of your mishap. I trust that you did not sustain a fall from the breakage."

"Oh dear no!" said Jack; then unguardedly adding, "It was only just above here, about half-a-mile back, as I came into the road; but somehow I could not see it afterwards. I suppose it is gone for good."

"Dinner at six sharp!" said Jemmy; "these fellows have to get back to Oxford to-night. Aint you all starving, without lunch?"

"Oh dear no!" said Lady Mary; "Mr. Marshall kindly supplied us with plenty of sandwiches and sherry."

"I promised you the first brush of the season, little one," said Jemmy to Georgie (he had done nothing of the sort); "but Ruby so completely stumped us all with the first fox, that I was obliged to give it up to him, and to find a second one at Whortle Woods for you. Perhaps Ruby will give you his also, if you ask him," he con-

tinued, reaching over and handing her the half-dried, raw-tipped brush ; while Miss Vane first opened her mouth at Jemmy in astonishment, and then turned round to face Georgie, looking as if she could eat her.

Ruby, from behind the Lady's shoulders, muttered ungallantly something, that he wanted his own brush, and Georgie must not be greedy. And Jack Marshall looked sheepishly impotent and in the shade as he drew back out of the way of Jemmy's presentation arm.

Georgie held out her hand for the *spolia opima* with a gleam of the old childish light upon her face, and with a brief, yet cordial "Thank you, Jemmy;" then took out her pocket-handkerchief to smooth and dry the fur, while Miss Vane exclaimed in disgust, "How can you, Georgie? — a clean handkerchief, and such a nasty, wet, muddy, bleeding thing as that!"

Then Jemmy, looking radiant and pleased with himself ; Ralph black, and scowling savagely at Jack Marshall ; Ruby and Dan relieved to be once more on the move, turned their heads towards a bridle-gate, to cut a mile corner off the road down to the Vale House, and left the britzska to pursue its way.

"Hang it!" said Jemmy, as they came to the gateway, and he dropped his fusee in the mud in an ineffectual attempt to light a havannah ; "that's my last. Have you got a light, Ralph?"

"Ne'er a one," said the latter, feeling his pockets ; "but here are some wax-matches. Cut up under the lee of this haystack, and they won't blow out."

"Here's summat of a find," said Dan, as he dismounted to reach an object which caught his eye under the rick,

while Jemmy was diligently burning a light under the cover of Ralph's beaver.

"Eh?" said Ralph, as he turned his head and saw Dan elevating a stirrup and new brown leather. "What the deuce is that?"

"That's young Mr. Marshall's, I'll swear any day," said the second whip to Dan, as he came up to inspect the treasure-trove.

"You can?" said Ralph sharply. "Brand-new! And where on earth is the breakage?" he continued, as he overhauled the sound and intact strap and buckle. "How can you swear to it?"

"I was in Mavis's the saddler's, Sir, in Ashton last Michaelmas when Mr. Marshall come in to order them irons. I remember the pattern, and that cross-bar in the hollow foot. I've seen 'em, too, since, and noticed 'em in the Grove harness-room."

"That's how Master Jack Marshall breaks his leathers, is it?" said Ralph. "We will have a look at his saddle before he starts home to-night; I'll take short odds the saddle is no more broken than the leather. "He's a sly beggar, Jem," he continued, as the two jogged on together, Ruby a little in the rear, untwisting a knot in his whip-thong.

"I don't see," said Jemmy indolently. "How did he lose his leather, if nothing broke or gave way?"

"Chucked it over the fence there to shirk the run, you old silly, and for an excuse to wriggle himself into Aunt Mary's carriage. Can't you see?"

"I know he's better to talk about hunting than to get over a country; but why should he want to play the fool

or invalid in her carriage? He's generally keen enough to see a run so long as there are plenty of roads and gateways."

"He thinks he is not a fool; that's just what it is. I only hope Georgie will never be so weak as to think him anything else; but he ought to be choked off at once, to make things safe."

"Georgie! what! how do you mean?" gasped Jemmy.

"Mean? Why the gowk is after Georgie, you old silly! Have you not twigged that with half an eye for the last six months? As good a catch in the way of coin, and as bad for common sense, as you would find in the two counties; but I hope there is no great danger."

"The devil!" said Jemmy, for once in a way using stronger language than his wont.

"I should think it was the devil if he got hold of her. I fancied you too good a parent not to have kept an eye all this time upon your little *protégé*."

"My *protégé*! The devil!" said Jemmy once more. "I mean," correcting himself suddenly, "I never dreamt of such a thing!"

"And Aunt Mary has made things worse by asking him to dinner, the brute! That was why he shunted his stirrup and lied like a trooper; and don't he chuckle, that's all! In the britzska all day, and nicking in for dinner at the end of it."

"Dinner!" said Jemmy savagely. "I'll jalap his claret; don't touch any of it to-night, stick to brown sherry, it's very sound.—'Ware dirt, young un!" he concluded to Ruby, as the boy splashed alongside of them to join the conversation.



"That's his game, is it?" thought Jemmy an hour later at his toilet, as he brushed his hair and whiskers viciously, and settled a white tie with unusual precision. "If he sneaks into my preserves again like this, I'll find out how much calomel he can carry in his nightcap without troubling the coroner."

"Where was it that your stirrup gave way, old fellow?" asked Ralph benignly of Marshall over the cod and oyster-sauce. "Was it the leather that went, or did the spring in the saddle break or give?"

"I don't know. The leather parted at the buckle-hole, that was it," said Jack hesitatingly. "It very nearly spilt me, taking me unawares like that," he added, to strengthen his position.

"Yes, you must have had a good grip to keep your seat under the circumstances," said Ralph demurely and flatteringly. "Then, if the saddle-clips are all right, you will be able to carry another stirrup of Jemmy's to go home with?"

"Certainly; I am very much obliged to Mr. Blake," was the answer, as Jack saw, to his delight, a reprieve from the jolting and bumping of Perfection, that in a five-mile ride home would have made even his delightful *vis-à-vis* drive with Georgie an expensive luxury.

"Have you got a small deal-box in the place, Jemmy?" asked Ralph *sotto voce* in the hall, as they went to the drawing-room.

"There's an empty one that a coat came in from Stultz's, somewhere under the billiard-table. What do you want it for?"

"That will do nicely," said Ralph, turning back. "I'll

tell you to-night later on ; our train is 9.45 ; see that the dogcart is in time, will you ? ”

“ See this box booked carefully by the carrier to Ashton to-morrow afternoon,” said Ralph to the valet-butler, when he had carefully tacked outside the case a label,—“ Glass, with care. To J. Marshall, Esq., Ashton Grove, Ashton,”—and had placed deftly in cotton-wool the intact stirrup-leather and iron, with an inscription affixed, “ Salvage, Monday, Nov. 3d. With Mr. James Blake’s compliments and good wishes.”





## CHAPTER XIV

### CROSS-PURPOSES.

**B**ARONET and the Lady stayed on at the Vale stables from the Monday to the Friday, so as to be fresh and on the spot for their respective owners on the morning of Jemmy's lawn-meet.

Miss Vane was to come over on the Thursday afternoon, ready for the mount which had been promised to, or rather importuned by, her.

It had been rather on Jemmy's conscience during that morning that he had so far been quite oblivious of making any preparations for Miss Vane's arrival—so far as stables were concerned ; the indoor *ménage* he had gladly turned over to Lady Mary. He was by no means sure that there was a respectable side-saddle in the place, and he would have seen Miss Vane anywhere before he would think of sending to the Maule for Georgie's saddle for anyone else's use.

Nor had the little horse, Tommy—a great pet, though

undersized for Jemmy's weight—as yet been tried with a petticoat ; for Jemmy rather grudged the use of him in any shape when it came to the scratch, and Miss Vane had seemed so thoroughly confident in her own powers, that Jemmy had seriously in his indolence intended her to give the first lesson *in propriâ personâ* to the little bay.

“ This is the day that you expect Miss Vane, is it not ? ” said Lady Mary at Thursday's breakfast, before Georgie had made her appearance.

“ I suppose so,” said the master.

“ Is she going to ride with the hounds to-morrow, or only to look on at the meet ? ”

“ I don't know,” said Jemmy ; “ whichever she likes.”

“ And what horse is she to ride ? ”

“ Tommy, the little blood bay, I think, will be the best for her ; but she may have her choice.”

“ What ! Are all your horses equally broken to carry a lady ? I did not know that they were so perfect.”

“ I do not know that any of them will,” said Jemmy wearily.

“ Do you mean to say that you are going to put her upon a horse that has never yet carried a lady or been broken to a skirt ? ”

“ She says she can ride ; and she can't expect my hunters to be ready-broken lady's hacks.”

“ My dear Jemmy, what next ! You will have some accident ; do try one of the horses yourself this afternoon ; don't run risks. You will make me quite nervous about her. How could you make the offer without knowing that your horses could carry her ? ”

“ She invited herself to ride,” said Jemmy ; “ I only

offered to put her up for the night lest she should do mischief with my horses behind my back."

"Well, for goodness' sake, see that her horse is a tried and safe one before she mounts it," said the aunt, as Georgie entered the room.

"I must see about a side-saddle first. Have you got one? I shall have to borrow one."

"Why not have Georgie's?—You will let Jemmy have yours to-morrow for Miss Vane, will you not, dear?" she said, turning to the young lady, who had said her "good-mornings," and was opening correspondence.

"My side-saddle?" said Georgie, colouring; "it is at the Maule I suppose by now. Of course Jemmy can have it if he wants it."

"If I sent for it, child, I should send for your own mare too. Would you not like to go out to-morrow?"

"No, thank you. I do not like to ride to hounds unless I have someone to take care of me, and you will have something else to do."

"Why should not Miss Vane ride Georgie's horse, saddle and all? it would be much safer, and would relieve my anxiety," said Lady Mary.

"Just so," said Jemmy, coming round to the idea when he remembered that Molly, Georgie's mare, though a perfect hack, could not jump a stick, and that this arrangement would effectually prevent Miss Vane from following the hounds or claiming his chaperonage.

"O, no," said Georgie piteously, "please not! Molly has never been hunted, and Clara is too heavy for her. She will kill her or lame her, and I should never have another like her."

"All right, then," said Jemmy, in dissatisfaction ; not so at all from Georgie's refusal to lend her horse, as from the still open prospect of Miss Vane's company and hindrance at cover-side and during the run, unless he could pass her on to another pilot ; then dropping the subject he applied himself vigorously to his morning correspondence and comestibles.

"Send a lad over at once to Halford, the vet. at Ashton," said he an hour later to Peter Mell, "and ask him to lend me a decent lady's hunting-saddle ; tell him at the same time that there are a couple more whip's horses coming over on Saturday to be looked at ; and I want him to examine and pass them if they are sound and suitable."

"Yes, master. What 'oss will you ride to-morrow, Sir ? Will you try the young brown, I think he's getting handy-like for second 'oss in the arternoon ?"

"Well, let's have him out, Peter ; if he can jump as big and clean as he did at the Maule, no fear of his putting me down at any flying fence. We did not do much with our second fox yesterday ; the young chestnut can come out again first horse to-morrow."

"Yes, Sir ; and Mr. Romilly's and Mr. Ruby's horses the same as before, Sir ?"

"They will come about half-past eight or nine o'clock ; send the whitechapel to meet them at the station. How does the young horse with the queer knees get on ?"

"Jumps very handy, and fast is he on the flat, Sir, I should say. He aint quite up to your weight, Sir, but he could win a nice handicap or two by the spring, if so be you have a mind to let him try it on."

"Would he carry a lady?" said Jemmy.

"Well, Sir, I should hardly like to put a lady on him just yet, he is a little hot; pulls rayther; leastways, not a young lady, Sir," was the reply; Peter's mind canvassing Georgie's nerves and physique on the assumption that the query had reference to her. "Mrs. White might do nicely on him maybe; they say nothing can't break her neck."

"Well, we won't try him at that just yet; but I want a horse for a lady to-morrow. Would Tommy carry one?"

"He's the likeliest, Sir, quiet little 'oss, and easy o' the mouth; I'm not aware that he was ever broken to it, though."

"Get a cloth to hang on, and try him to stand the tickling at two o'clock this afternoon. I shall come out and see how he goes."

"Will you come and see how Tommy stands a skirt?" said the master, as he rose from lunch, to Georgie and his aunt; "it will kill time till Miss Vane comes to amuse you."

"I am glad you are going to make experiments before putting her on him," said Lady Mary; "but I do not think my opinion will be worth much.—Get your hat, Georgie, and come."

So they went out together to the paddock at the back of the stables where Peter, with a long horse-cloth hung upon his saddle, was cantering the bay. The little horse showed no impatience under the novelty, and was as quiet as a lamb with Peter's experienced handling.

"How will he do?" asked the master, as Peter pulled up to them.

"First-rate, I think, Sir. I'm a-waitin' for the side-saddle to have another try with it ; but the little 'oss goes as if he'd been used to it all his life."

"Here it comes," said Jemmy, as a stable-lad came to the paddock-gate with a side-saddle in his hand.

"That's right, Sir. Now, would Miss have a try on him that the saddle is ready ? He's quite safe, I'll be bound."

Georgie looked quite inclined for the task, and Jemmy said,

"Run and get your habit while we change the saddles, and I'll take Duchess with you for half an hour ; if he will carry you he will carry Miss Vane well enough."

And this last sentence decided Georgie, who was already on the move to the house ; she stopped, hesitated, and said,—

"Perhaps I had better not. I am not sure that papa would like me to ride a horse that had never before carried a lady. Miss Vane can do so if she likes. I would rather not try it."

This was as good, or as bad, as a fib on Miss Warren's part. She, and all of them, well knew that she, or at all events Lady Mary, was mistress when she was at the Maule, and that the colonel would not for an instant have troubled his head about the *carte-blanche* that was granted in his absence to any fancy of Georgie's, under her relative's sanction.

Lady Mary simply said,

"Do what you think best, my dear ; I think Jemmy is generally to be trusted about horses ; but do not attempt it if you feel nervous, or think your papa would not like you to try it."



And Jemmy, looking disappointed, turned to Peter, who had not heard the conversation, and said,

"Miss Warren does not feel inclined to try the horse, until he has been ridden a little more. See how he goes with the side-saddle; stop his water, and have him ready for hunting with the side-saddle at half-past ten o'clock to-morrow."

"A deal showier nor any of 'em in the whole field, she'll be," said Peter to his subordinate, as he shifted the saddles and watched the retiring figures of the ladies and the M.F.H.; "and sound too in wind and limb, I warrant; good head and neck, well set on, nice in the mouth, sloping shoulders, small ears, good eye, clean about the pastern-joints, rayther light in the bone; but there's nothing like a thoroughbred un. Master always goes in for a bit of blood; dessay she'd take well to the collar, but if she goes a-huntin'—There's no master can't attend to the hounds and women at the same time. I hates petticoats and huntin'. That old baggage Mrs. White, she can go, she can, but she's always a-top of the hounds if they're huntin' on a cold scent; lamed Chorister, and another on 'em, so Dan'll's tellin' me, only yesterday. Drat wimin, says I, out a-huntin'; and bless 'em of an evening inside the bar!"

"I hope I did not vex you by not wishing to ride?" said Georgie, entering Jemmy's den half-an-hour later, with perhaps the least *souppon* of pink on her eyelids; "I am sure you know best whether a horse is safe for me; if you like I will dress and go with you now to try it."

It had cost Georgie a good deal, not so much to make the apology, as the offer at the latter part of her speech,

for reminiscences of her last *tête-à-tête* ride with Jemmy thronged startlingly into her head as she spoke ; but Jemmy seemed so disposed of late to lapse back to his old paternal footing, that she had found it less difficult than it would otherwise have been to ignore that one startling incident of the past, and to accept the position of *protégée* in which he seemed willing to replace her.

Jemmy put out his hand good-humouredly and said, "It was not fair to ask you to run risks for Clara Vane's benefit" (had he divined the existence of jealousy ?), "I did not mean that you should ; did you think so ?"

"I don't know," she replied, walking away instinctively up to the window, hardly knowing why, till she found herself, to her own astonishment, blushing vigorously, and feeling something more like hatred to her former school-friend than anything she had ever known before.

"I only fancied," continued Jemmy, "that you might have liked the ride in a general way, if the horse was safe ; you did not bring Molly with you, and I had no idea that any horse of mine would carry a lady till this ride of Miss Vane's put the thing into my head this morning ; else I would have had Tommy broken for you long ago."

Jemmy again put his foot in it ; he had meant to imply that, although he had granted Clara Vane's request to mount her for the Friday, he had literally been too oblivious or too indolent to provide a suitable horse for her until Lady Mary had broached the subject at breakfast ; but Georgie, who had come in late for most of that conversation, and whose thoughts were running in another groove, at once construed him the other way, and felt

still more aggrieved that Miss Vane should have been able to tempt Jemmy to take the trouble of breaking a horse for her, while he had never thought of doing so for his own cousin. So that when Jemmy, after a second's pause, continued,

"Don't ride to oblige me or Clara Vane. I can't make out exactly whether you would really like to try the horse on your own hook—if so, go and get ready at once; I will send back to Mell to shift his saddle if he has not taken him in; we can move about gently through the fields without taking the edge off Tommy for to-morrow;" and he got up to ring the bell as he finished.

Again the last sentence had spoilt the prelude, and Georgie promptly said,

"I don't care to ride—I had much rather not; only I thought you wanted me, and it would have been ill-natured in me to have refused. Peter can tell you whether Tommy is safe for Clara without my trying him; she can ride much better than I can; he is not likely to kick her off, or else I suppose you would not let her go out with the hounds."

"Then you won't come with me?" said Jemmy, disappointed, and with about as much pique as his good-humour would admit of.

"No, thank you; you don't want me; it is wasting time, and Aunt Mary I think wants me to mark some napkins for her this afternoon."

And she left the room, even less pleased with herself than when she entered it; and Jemmy scratched his head, picked a pink embossed note of Clara Vane's (announcing her intended advent at 5 P.M. that day) off his

writing-table, crumpled it viciously, and pitched it into the fire ; gave a long-winded half-grunt, half-sigh ; fell back upon his standard solace of a prime havannah ; and diving his hands into the skirts of his shooting-coat, strolled off to superintend Dan Morgan in drafting the hounds for the morrow's duty.





## CHAPTER XV

### AGAINST THE GRAIN.



BRIGHT, gleamy, golden sunrise, westerly breeze, fleecy clouds, and a falling glass, greeted Mr. James Blake as he splashed into his matutinal tub on the morrow. Nervous and fidgety with the cares of office and housekeeping, he overcame his usual indolence, and was soon down stairs, in a sort of hunting dishabille, stockinged legs and slippered feet displaying themselves vice cream-topped *chefs-d'œuvre* of Bartley's, and a gray shooting-jacket supplanting *pro tem.* his double-breasted pink.

He ranged the dining-room and counted the covers and plates laid for his expected arrivals; he sought the stables, and felt the horses' legs all round and hurried off the trap that was to escort Ralph and Ruby from the station. He wandered back like an unquiet spirit into the kitchen, and insisted on putting his cook up to a wrinkle in the art of devilling kidneys, splitting bloaters, and toasting anchovies. He descended into his cellar to

take out materials for a brew of mulled claret, for the benefit of any who cared to ruin their digestions and wind for the day, selected some curaçoa and maraschino, as a more legitimate *bonne-bouche* finale to the substantials, and gave out a plentiful supply of old tom for the recreation of underlings and hangers-on in the outer air.

And then he came back through the drawing-room to his den, to polish off a short relay of correspondence, decline the courteous offer of some draft harriers and old saddles left in the hands of the executors of a neighbouring sporting incumbent lately defunct; to communicate with his agent relative to a tenant farmer who would neither pay rent nor quit; to refer to the local solicitor of Ashton a couple of malcontent dowagers, who already claimed damages for lost poultry; and to accept with thanks a couple of offers from distant landowners of accommodation and hospitality for himself and staff when he should next draw in their direction.

But he had scarcely settled in his study-chair ere Miss Vane, who, attired in the neatest of riding-habits, was also down betimes, and had been vocalising on the drawing-room pianoforte for the benefit of later slumberers, charged him open-handed and open-mouthed, inquisitive as to breakfast hours, condition of hounds and horses, solicitous as to her host's night's rest, full of anecdotes of her own doings during the week at Ashton Grove, hopeful of fine weather and good sport, timorous of blank draws and a rainy afternoon — while Jemmy passively subsided into an easy-chair and stood fire with admirable fortitude.

“I thought I heard you practising in the next room,”

said he, as a last resource, when she checked for a moment to gain breath. "Pray do not let me interrupt you."

"O no ; I like talking to you—unless you want me to practise ; shall I play to you ?"

Out of the frying-pan into the fire ; for Miss Vane, though she had fair powers of manipulation, had no vestige of touch, and enforced "expression" with the whole weight of her fine arm from the shoulder. So Jemmy went through the doorway to collapse on a settee and endure auricular purgatory. And to make matters worse, Clara Vane had not half finished murdering a sonata of Beethoven's when Georgie's face appeared through the library-door, and was as quickly clouded and withdrawn, yet not so quickly as to escape Jemmy's wandering and distracted gaze, and loudly he hallooed to her to come back, that he wanted her ; but the *fff*'s of the piano made Georgie conveniently deaf, and she came not.

At the last moment Jemmy's unbooted legs were a godsend to him, and excusing himself on the plea of completing his toilet, he slipped away, and sought sanctuary in his bed-room, and took good care not again to leave the shelter till the roll of a pair of wheels announced the advent betimes of Algernon Paget and a pal on leave from the Curragh.

Jemmy never made a worse breakfast in his life than that morning, even with Lady Mary doing hostess *vis-à-vis* to him, and Georgie, Ruby, and Ralph sedulously aiding him in the honours. Everyone had a word for him, especially those who had made a virtual if not a

nominal *déjeuner* at home before they started ; and the M.F.H. painfully realised his own proverb, that it was ruination to talk and eat too.

By the time that a loving-cup had circulated, and liqueurs and "pick-me-ups" made their rounds, he was still little better off than when he began, and in despair he smuggled a couple of tepid sausages into the recesses of his pink, as a reserve exclusive of the funds of his luncheon-case.

His next ordeal was to put up Miss Vane under public gaze at his own door-step. Gladly would he have shirked, and deputed the duty to Peter Mell ; he had already made an effort to sneak off after Ralph and Ruby to the stables, and leave her to his stud-groom's mercy, but she would not be denied, and pleading for the aid of his arm, and expressing her horror of grooms' innate clumsiness, made him order his own chestnut to meet him at the door, and escort her in person to where Tommy and Peter were waiting.

"Go back at once," said he *sotto voce* to his dependant, "shove on your boots, and come out on Duchess to take care of Miss Vane."

"She's been to the station already, master, and had her corn since, and water—will break her wind for certain, it will, if we comes to a gallop."

"Can't help it—go and take her ; stop ! try the young horse if you like, instead ; but make sure you come on something. We shall jog on to the Gannow Gorse, if we don't find in the park. Look sharp."

One last bright idea struck our master as he slacked the chestnut's curb-chain and saw Jack Marshall pre-



paring to mount a few yards off from him. Leaving his horse in the groom's hands, he hurried to his new antipathy, and with creditable diplomacy at once opened fire with—"Look here, old fellow, I know you're a sort of lady's man; will you take care of one for me to-day, just for the present, till Peter comes out to relieve you? I am so busy with my hounds, you know."

"Yes, to be sure," said Jack eagerly, who had been wincing during the early part of the speech under the remembrance of the *double entendre* of the salvaged stirrup; and who could divine no other than Georgie as the lady whose charge had devolved on Jemmy.

"Thanks; you're a trump!" said Jemmy with relief. "Miss Vane's just going to mount now; I will hand her over to you; mind you make yourself agreeable;" and Jack's face fell into an expression of ludicrous misery. And Jemmy, chuckling to himself at his ruse, hoisted the young woman into her saddle, and then said,

"I shall have so much to attend to with the hounds, Miss Vane, that it would not be fair to trust you alone to such a half-escort. If, as I suppose, you want to see a little more of the run than you would get along the roads with old Sir John, there's his son Jack, a first-rate horseman, you know, who will be a dutiful squire, and my man Peter is coming out to follow you in a few minutes."

Miss Vane's face fell as low as had Jack Marshall's, but she only replied, "So kind of you to take so much trouble, Mr. Blake, but I hope I shall not give anybody much to do; this seems such a charming little horse, and I mean to jump everything, you know; I shall follow you as close as I can. Mayn't I?"

"O dear yes, by all means!" said he as he turned back to his young one. "Hang her!" he grunted as he swung himself into his saddle; "if she can't follow, she's bound to halloo to me to wait or help her; and if she can, she's like enough to jump a-top of me if this beggar gets cropped. Drat women hunting, all the world over!" and he gave the signal to Dan to move on down the park.

To the credit of the Vale House keeper there were a brace of foxes at once a-foot from a small pheasant-cover not a thousand yards from the house. The pack had barely joined chorus on the scent of one of them that began at once to dodge and run the underwood, when the other stole away in a blind corner, where two deep straggling fences met in an apex, at the further end of the cover, with only one exit practicable for a horse within two hundred yards, a newly excavated drain, bridged with a foot-board, leading to a hog-backed stile into the next field.

Ralph viewed him as he slipped across the apex of the triangle, and having watched him through the fence safe into the middle of the next enclosure, gave a rattling halloo, that speedily brought three couple of hounds, who were wavering in their allegiance between the two scents, racing to the sound, and at once to take up the line and start a rival melody as they streamed across the field.

"Gone away!" sung out Ned Masters, while the field charged frantically down the side of the cover along which the hounds had been running to the corner where Ralph was standing, with Ruby and Ned close behind him, and then pulled up *en masse* to contemplate the entanglement of briars and depths of drain in front of them.

"Come up!" said Ralph to the Baronet, as he shoved him hard at the drain and stile, and was safe in the next field, the three couple already slipping out of sight through the further fence.

"Hold hard, do!" roared Jemmy, galloping down on the other side of cover to the corner; "that's not our fox—they're running him still in cover."

"It's all right," said Ruby, "there are three couple on ahead, come along!" and he followed Ralph; chuckling at the idea of stealing a march; Ned Masters and two others close at his heels, the rest, some looking and craning, some galloping round to a gateway at a distance.

"Give me a lead, will you, Mr. Marshall?" said Clara Vane as she came up, and had no idea of not following Ruby, especially as she saw Jemmy, in despair of bringing back his runaways, crash through the fence lower down in the next field, having sent back his second whip to bring on Dan and the main body, gallop after his vanishing cousins, and blow his horn for retreat from cover, while Mrs. Major White and Captain Starkie were handy at his heels. And Jack, with his eyes wandering, and his heart behind him, put his horse slowly and irresolutely at the drain, and was gratified that the animal, not knowing his own mind any more than his master, checked and wheeled round on the track, somewhat disturbing the elegance of Jack Marshall's seat, but giving him excuse for a grunted anathema and a request for someone else to show the way.

"Allow me, please!" said Major Crawley of the Royals, who had just quitted the quarter where Daniel's hounds were still running, and quickly picked his way through

the remains of the crowd ; and coming none too fast at the obstacle, for want of space, he hit the stile pretty hard, but landed safe, and looked back for the lady.

Clara Vane went pluckily after her leader, Tommy making no blunder, nor shaking her more in her seat than a judicious prop from the pommel could rectify ; and while Dan in a fume came sailing with his hounds down the other side of cover, and landed in the field a hundred yards to their right, the major, taking off his hat, with a "This way, I think, Madam !" led the way parallel to Dan to the line in which some half-a-dozen riders in an extended tail were following the run of the three couple of hounds that had stolen the start.

"Spilin' the hounds—spilin' hounds !" said Dan to Ralph as he brought up the main body to where the run-aways had thrown up their heads in a turnip-field, nearly a mile from cover, where some fifteen horses had already landed, and others were rapidly arriving from the next field. The hounds spread to their cast, and hit-off the line sharp to the right on the other side of the next fence—and after them followed a fairish field over an easy country of light land, with more agriculture than was usual in the Old Vale. The pace was fair, but not heart-breaking ; the van could all hold their own ; the simplicity of the fences induced a larger average than usual to go straight ; and Clara Vane held on manfully in the wake of the master. Peter Mell, on the young Ethelbert, had caught them, and was handling him prettily close to his charge. Algernon Paget was up better than usual, for his morning cordial had been strong, and the fences were plainsailing, but Jack Marshall was nowhere.

So they held on, with no great tortuosity, for another three miles, till the taint of a flock of sheep checked them once more. Dan Morgan, the hounds' natural cast having failed them, made his own *au Treadwell*, at full gallop, and lost no time in hitting-off the scent in the next pasture, while a ploughboy's halloo on the brow of a rise a little to the left, told still more of their line.

And Jemmy, who had noted the halloo, and knew, moreover, that the Glyde, the main river of the Old Vale, not half a mile in front, averaged sixteen or seventeen feet of water, banks very rotten and rat-holed, but a ford handy not a hundred yards from the line of the halloo, thought it was not fair to give Miss Vane the chance of jumping on him (as Mrs. White so nearly had done on the Monday) in case his horse should blunder the landing—so turning his head straight at a high and tangled bull-finch, he crashed into and through, not without hopes that Miss Vane would shun an obstacle that might inflict injuries which no kalydor or cosmetics could restore.

But Clara's heart was already on the right side of the fence, and Tommy being nothing loth, she came bravely after the leader, and escaped with a slight scratch on the chin, her hat dangling round her neck, and her chignon high and dry on a briar.

"O, Mr. Blake!" she screamed piteously, as she put her hand behind her head to repair damages, and discovered her loss.

"All right, Miss!" said Peter, as he put the four-year-old in the track, whip and reins tucked in the right hand, and "fielded" the article cleverly with his bridle-arm as he came through; "most like an urchin—or nest," he con-

tinued, half to himself as he came up, examining the non-descript piece of furniture.

"Please carry it; I can't take it now," said Miss Vane, who would not for worlds give up her place in the wake of Jemmy, and was not sure, after all, that a streaming and *négligée chevelure* might not in itself be ornamental and interesting rather than otherwise.

So Peter tucked the bolster into his deep-skirted coat, while Jemmy, who had neither heard nor heeded the catastrophe, cleared a low stile in the footway to the ford, and careered over the next field; and a couple of hundred yards to his right the hounds swept round a curve, the other leading horsemen working a little outside them, but pointing to one of the awkwardest reaches of the whole stream, with a complete swamp, fetlock deep, leading up to it.

Jemmy's forethought stood him now in good stead.

"Over he goes!" said Dan, as the pack, close together as a table-cloth, held on straight up to the line of willows, plunged in, and in a few seconds were struggling helter-skelter up the opposite bank, shaking their jackets as they reached *terra firma*.

"Hold up!" said Ralph, as Baronet changed his legs and staggered in the deep ground before the take-off, and in a second or two had dropped with his chest on the opposite bank and quarters all afloat; while his rider, who felt the catastrophe coming, had slipped his feet from the stirrups, and placing his knee on the pommel, escaped with both boots full of water.

Ruby came straight on not two paces to his left, and in another second was swimming safely clear of the Lady,

who crossed her legs and rolled in without time to recover herself, or make the least rise as she took off.

Dan on the right, and fifty yards further back, pulled short up when he saw Ralph and Ruby splashing hock-deep in watery grass before they had reached the stream; then, galloping off to a firmer piece of ground in the next field to the right, oblivious of the ford, or thinking that the hounds were swinging his way, got safely over, with a scramble and stagger in the landing. Ned Masters and Captain Starkey were soon with him, and Major Crawley had the satisfaction of a cold bath in company with Mrs. Major White, who looked more like a walrus than a mermaid by the time that he had got out the horses and helped her back to her saddle.

But Jemmy, nicking in nicely with his ford straight to the point of halloo, was alone behind his hounds as he topped the brow, and saw to his disgust on the slope below him a score of road-hunters under the pilotage of Sir John, who knew almost the run of every fox in the county, and had led them straight to the corner of Alford's dingle as soon as Ralph and the three couple had shown their point away from the Vale-House cover.

"Bless me," said Sir John when he reached his cross-road and saw a blank expanse before him, "he's not come yet!" for the labourers in the turnip-field, and the cur guarding the sheep, had each broken the fox from his line, and driven him to a circuit before he could again make good his point. But Sir John was not far wrong when, half a minute later, the draggled varmint stole along the ridge of the hill on the slope of which he stood, not caring to accelerate his pace for the ploughboy's halloo,

and disappeared in the near corner of the dingle. It was some four or five minutes before the leaders of the pack, with a *sauve qui peut* for each and all as they had in turn scrambled out of the water and had not got shaken together, came streaming over the brow in good chorus, and raced down the ride to the dingle-head.

"Very pretty, very pretty indeed," said the old man ; "got it all to themselves." For no one else was in sight.

But in another breath the favoured ones of the ford, led by our master, headed the hill ; the Lady close in Jemmy's tracks, and the four-year-old pulling double under Peter Mell's spare frame.

"We have hit you off nicely," said Sir John, making no secret of the means of his illicit presence, as Jemmy drew rein under the dingle, which was echoing to the music of the pack, though the majority of Sir John's followers—among them his son and heir—would fain have looked as if they had earned their pride of place in the most legitimate manner.

'Then before they had forced the fox away once more at the lower end of the cover, Dan had come up, and close behind him Ralph, who, though he had quickly got Baronet on to his legs, had stayed to help Ruby before he remounted.

"I'm afraid you're rather moist, young un," said Jemmy ironically, as Ruby ranged alongside of him.

"So would you have been, if you had taken off in such slush. Where did you come over?"

"In a place of my own," said Jemmy. "Forrard, forrard!" to change the subject.

And as Jemmy and Sir John led the way to a gateway,



while the hounds ran the line down the lower end of the dingle that converged into a watercourse, Miss Vane appealed to Jack Marshall.

"Have we not had a charming ride? I never enjoyed anything so much in my life. I am glad you are here, but I did not see you before. I suppose you took your own line, as they say?"

"Certainly," said Jack complacently. "It was not so bad so far as we came, but rather slow, or there would not be so many of the field up."

"Forrard on!" cried Dan, as the hounds poured out of the corner of the dingle and followed down to the bottom of a pasture where ran a fairish tributary of the Glyde, with a nice bit of low thorn-fence to make the horses rise at it.

"Here we are again," said Miss Vane as she put Tommy's head in the master's track and came safely over, but very loose in her saddle from the depth of the drop.

And Jack, alongside of her and with a close lead from Ralph Romilly, could not for shame's sake draw rein, but at the same time snatching nervously at his horse's head as the animal rose to the fence, pulled him out of his stride, and brought him down with his hind-legs in the water, into which the rider himself immediately subsided, tail first, in his hurry to extricate himself.

"Who's down?" said Jemmy, as the riderless horse, having scrambled clear, caught the leaders as they cantered slowly over a twenty-acre water-meadow, and swerving in front of Dan as they came to the next fence, extracted an anathema from that worthy.

"Muster John Marshall, I think," said Dan, as he wheeled round for a fresh run and recognised the horse, and saw Jack's white buckskins gleaming at the back end of the enclosure, while the majority of the roadsters who had followed Sir John to the dingle were again close in his tracks through a line of gateways far on the left. "In the ditch ; like to be drowned, maybe," he added in a matter-of-fact way, as a pair of knees were all he could distinguish.

"Let him bide ; he aint wanted," said Jemmy murderously, reflecting that Jack had proved no use as chaperon to Clara, and losing no love on his rival, as his memory harked back to Monday's stirrup-trick ; but in a few strides more his good-nature reinstated his charity, and beckoning to Peter Mell, who was cantering the young one a few yards to the right of him, bade him go to the assistance of Jack Marshall in the next field.

The fox held on for another three miles, of pasture for the most part, and stiffer fencing than had been found in the early part of the run ; but the pace became more and more moderate, as the hounds hung at every fence, though they came to no definite check, till at last, as they came into a small parish cross-road, they threw up their heads and seemed utterly at fault.

"That's what broke off the scent," said Captain Starkey to Jemmy—after Dan had made an ineffectual cast forward, then one back, and was as a last chance taking a slow wide cast all round—pointing to a thick cloud from the north-east that had gradually worked up to them on an upper and counter current of air, and of which the first few heavy drops now began to fall, and the cold wind to

blow as the hitherto western breeze collapsed under the invasion of the rival.

"All up for the day, I am afraid," said the master, as the rain came steadier and faster,—not a winter drizzle, but more like a summer storm, barring the temperature."

"Give it up, Dan," presently said Mr. Blake; "we can do no more in this, and have had a fair gallop."

Ralph and Ruby, at the first intimation of failure and withdrawal, had set their heads home at a steady trot, with a seven mile ride before them.

Peter Mell had not turned up in the front again after being sent back to the relief of Jack Marshall in distress. Having caught the horse and led him to the gentleman, who, damp and slimy, was by that time making his way to meet him, he turned the young one's head once more on to the line, and after overhauling some six or seven of the tail, came, in trying to hit off a slight angle towards the leaders, a terrific mucker upon a turnip-heap that had been veiled by a blind half-foliaged bullfinch, and rolling over and over, young one and all, for some yards, found his breastplate and a girth burst in the struggle, sufficiently to put him *hors de combat* at least till the remnants of the tail and line were irretrievably out of sight.

So Mr. James Blake had nothing for it but to do the courteous and escort Miss Vane in his own person. Nor was his happiness improved by observing that she was rapidly becoming damp under the falling rain, and that as a matter of mere courtesy he could do nothing else than proffer her the mackintosh which, from a careful study of the barometer, he had taken especial care to bring that day for his own preservation, and had already

bestowed upon his own shoulders. There was no help for it, and Miss Vane, so far from declining, as Jemmy had fondly hoped, accepted the loan with *empressement*,—tucking herself in the sleeves and body, expressing herself very comfortable, and so pleased with her ride,—had no objection to a pull from Jemmy's sherry-flask, and stood with equanimity a couple of bright flashes of lightning and peals of thunder that varied the monotony of the ride home.

She would fain have launched as usual into conversation, but Jemmy, who was too occupied with buttoning his double-breasted pink as much as possible over his chest, and in trying to keep the water from trickling down his neck, implored her to look where she was going, and pleaded so hard that the storm made too much noise for him to hear even himself speak, that she was fain to allow him a respite, nor take all the advantage of the ride and late return which she had hoped to reap for herself.

Jemmy stood upon no ceremony, but rode straight into the stable-yard with his charge, so as to get under shelter as soon as possible.

Then he piloted Miss Vane through the kitchen-pas-sages, and cut short her interrogatories as to the whereabouts of this and that, and her wish to inspect at once the kitchen-range, by pointing out that he, if not she, was soaking to the skin, and that perhaps they both ran a fair risk of lumbago, Jemmy's especial bugbear.

"Are you very wet, Jemmy?" said Georgie solicitously, as she left her lunch and met him outside the dining-room door, where, having packed Miss Vane up stairs in charge

of Lady Mary's maid, he was endeavouring to drag his boots off before the hall-fire.

"Yes, rather moist; send me up a glass of hot grog, pretty stiff, and lump of sugar, will you, and ask if Miss Vane will have some. See that some lunch is kept hot for us, like a good child."

"Yes, I will. How came you so drenched? Why did not you take a mackintosh? Even I could have told you it was going to pour: the glass is falling almost to 'stormy.'"

"I did," grunted Jemmy, as the bootjack at last got a bite on the greasy heel of his boot, and he tugged it off with a groan, "I lent it to Clara Vane as we came home. See about the grog, do, my child."

"Oh!" said Georgie, and no more, as she went back into the dining-room and mixed Jemmy's tumbler with her own hands, sent it up, and then sat down to apply herself to her lunch, with appetite suddenly vanished. Then in a few seconds, half ashamed of herself, she left her plate untasted, and ordered a cup of tea with a spoonful of brandy in it, for Miss Vane, and went up stairs to see in person after the comfort of her cousin's guest.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### THROUGH THE MILL.

**T**HE days of November passed short and sweet to Mr. Blake in the Old Vale House. So far as the hounds and county had been concerned, matters had shown themselves *couleur de rose*. Never, in the memory of the indefinite "oldest inhabitant" of the Old Vale, had foxes been so game or hounds so fast for weeks in succession, as during the autumn of Mr. Blake's dynasty. The good reputation of the pack made itself felt beneficially upon the locality in general, in more ways than one. Hunting-men on the move for winter-quarters, however sceptical of the puffing mendacities of letter-writers to the sporting-papers, describing, as they usually do, five-mile ring canter as ten-mile straight-on-end gallops, enlarging runlets to rivers, ditches to dykes, and interpreting lines of gateways as a stiff timber country, could not quite shut their eyes and ears to the flying reports that reached the outer world, as the days grew darker and shorter, of the wondrous run of luck—or good

management, be it as it may—that the Old-Vale country was enjoying. “Cavendish,” the hunting-critic of the *Gentleman's Sporting-Chronicle*, had been down to see the hounds and the country; and though Jemmy in his simplicity had not taken out his cheque-book to secure laudatory “bonneting” by a judicious *douceur*, yet his hospitable good-humour and liberal provision of a couple of safe “mounts,” with Peter Mell as esquire to the cockney, to open gates and pilot him from point to point of the run, so won the reviewer's heart that, without descending to fulsome adulation, he condescended to tell the truth, and at least do justice to the merits and *ménage* of the establishment in the Old Vale.

Nor was the M.F.H. the only individual gratified by the popularity of the Old Vale Hunt; in fact, when rough-riding Oxonians began to come their thirty miles by rail to his covers, and numbers of subalterns sought to lead instead of being led by the hounds, there were times when Mr. Blake's heart grew sore, and his sympathies were stung as he saw his pets overridden at each check and pressed beyond the scent by the shoal of jealous ones who rode far more from emulation of each other than love of seeing hounds hunt. But on the whole, the master's vanity was tickled as his prestige advanced, and the surrounding populace grew gay at the prospect of harvest. The principal inns of Ashton were crowded, stabling at a premium, the old Crown and Sceptre of Creswick charmed out of its antique propriety by an influx of blood and fashion. Butchers, bakers, and corn-chandlers felt the benefit of increased demand for supply; farmers found a handy market for blood-like

young ones, well shown off in the field; Mavis the saddler and Halford the vet. drove a brisk trade; and old Laurence, the local dealer and breaker, began seriously to think of taking a lease of larger premises.

Gaieties were rapidly on the increase; the Ashton town-hall had been taken for a grand performance of private theatricals; mammas with a heavy stock of daughters on hand looked forward to happy settlements, and deliverance from anxieties, when they heard that a bachelor-ball was to be added to the annual Christmas festivities of the Hunt-ball, that the master himself was going to do his duty with a similar entertainment at the Vale House; that Lady Kenilworth, who since old Lord Kenilworth had lost that "cracker" over Thormanby's Derby and had cut down so much timber to square matters at Tattersall's, had lived much in seclusion, was coming again out of her shell and intending to give a dance at Christmas in honour of the eldest girl—the Lady Evelyn Kensil—whose seventeenth birthday had flown in midsummer, and who now pleaded to be licensed as formally "out."

And not least among the many more or less eligibles of the Old Vale sought for on most occasions, a godsend to mothers from his apparently unfettered, unattached state, a valuable commodity among the male population on account of his easy-going temper, facility for whist, social dinners and sound wine, stood our master himself. Not a dinner-party within any accessible radius was complete without him; beyond eight miles his bed was usually offered him in addition; and every married and daughtered landowner whose covers had ever been



known to produce a fox, bred or bagged, pleaded for the honour of Mr. Blake's company at breakfast, with dinner and bed proffered according to circumstances, whenever it should be convenient to him to draw in that direction.

Mr. Blake felt rather overdone with all this hospitality ; he enjoyed his rubber and his dinner, but was still, with the exception of the friends whom he found at the Maule, as much a misogynist as ever. He liked his forty winks after dinner, whenever he could afford them, and enjoyed a good bowlful of tea—a substantial breakfast-cup, at the least—not the scalding thimblefuls usually purveyed by the hostess after dinner, but a drain to soothe his digestion and thirst, no lack of cream, and no defilement of sugar—for the latter commodity Mr. James Blake studiously eschewed, as representing an extra fourteen pounds in the saddle, if indulged in for three months.

Such minor luxuries as these Jemmy could enjoy in places where he felt at home, and could dispense with on emergency, when society was agreeable, or the call for the sacrifice not too frequent. But at too many houses of new acquaintance strange faces and artificial spirits put him on his best behaviour, with rigid respect for etiquette and decorum ; showy yet badly-cooked, badly-served dinners damped and disappointed his appetite—inefficient waiting, especially in the thirsty delay for the first glass of sherry, or dawdling with vegetables while his meat was getting cold, tried his patience ; bad and undrinkable wine worried his stomach ; indifferent music in the evening bullied his nerves and tortured his digestion.

Of late he had learnt, forewarned, forearmed, to plead pre-engagements, at least on mere hunting-days, when invited by any host of whose first hospitality he entertained unpleasant reminiscences, and to sneak off instantaneously to the Maule for shelter and to appease the white lie to his conscience.

He had just come in from a couple of capital early gallops that had accounted satisfactorily for a brace of foxes, and was enjoying a cabana in his den, when the second delivery brought him his London papers and the following letter :

*Merton Coll., Oxford, Dec. 1.*

“DEAR JEMMY, — Our grinds came off last week ; Ralph won the Welter race on Baronet, and I won the hack race on a little horse of Symonds’s, but rode very badly in a four-pound saddle. I won’t try that sort of thing again just yet. I can’t sit strong in one.

“I rode Gamecock in the open race, and was first into the winning field ; but Meriel, of Christchurch, on a new horse, Mayfair, beat me easily in the run in—the brute wouldn’t try at the last.

“Now, the Christchurch grinds come off next Saturday, and I want something to run for the open race there ; it will be worth a good forty quid. Gamecock is no use when it comes to racing, and I don’t want to spoil Lady by teaching her to rush, she does it too much already. The men up here have a very strong lot of horses this term, so Ralph says, who has known other seasons. Mayfair won two hunters’ races somewhere in the spring, and is really good form. Baronet has to carry 14lbs.

extra in all races, for having won 100 sovs. at Aylesbury ; and I do not see what is to beat the 'house' horses in this open race, even allowing that some of their best will be drawn away for their close races.

"Ralph's new chestnuts are not broken enough to be safe over a country, though they will make clinkers in time. What I want is that young brown horse of yours for the Christchurch race. The conditions are 11st. 7lbs. each, for horses the property of members of the university (no stipulation as to past or present, but to be ridden by undergraduates) ; your horse therefore can run. Let me nominate and ride him. The course is a very safe one, Ralph and I rode over to it with Meriel yesterday, and looked about it. You will be able to see what the brown horse is really worth, by a line with Mayfair and Baronet ; Ralph will race him at 12st. 7lbs. for the sake of the line if you want it. Do lend him me. It is a private race, so handicappers will know nothing, and you will carry no future penalties, as it is not so much as 50 sovs. ; nor is it open.

"In haste.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"C. R. BLAKE."

"Saturday," thought Jemmy ; "not a hunting-day. I might go down myself and see the grinds ; but the young one is in no condition — can't run as he is. See what Peter says ;" and he went down to the stables.

"Peter, the young horse by King Tom, seems pretty handy now ; went very well last week. How is he for condition ; do you think he could do a chase this week ?"

"Chase, master? No, surely. He's too big; least-ways, to win; might be handy for an airin' or so," he continued, estimating his master's turf probity by his own, as learnt in the professional school of racing.

"I don't want to air him, Peter; that's not in my line. I want him to win if he can, and to try, if it will not do him harm. He will have no very great company to meet — a sort of close hunters' race. Nothing beyond a 10st. 7lbs. small handicap form for him to beat. Can he do that?"

"Where be it, Master?" interrogated Peter, thinking of the hunters' race at Chertsey that week, and remembering that if that were the venture he knew at least two of Ellis's in it that were not going to put their best foot foremost for some time to come, and would then be out of the way of the winning-post, and so simplify matters.

"You won't find it in *Bell* or the *Calendar*; it is a college-race down at Oxford, and about the same form as the Aylesbury race. This is Monday; gallop him for the next three days, and I'll send him down on Friday. We can't do more than try. Could you put him and the young Ethelbert together on Thursday?"

"He's fittest of the two, Sir, but he aint the class, I think, that the brown 'oss is, though he could win a nice-ish handicap some day, if you've a mind. Maybe the brown 'oss can win where you says it is, if the fencin' is big, and the pace steady. If we be to put the two together, it should be at 21 pound, or I'm a coper."

"Very well, you shall ride the Ethelbert and Mr. Ruby shall have the brown. I have got plenty of weights and

cloths; they shall run at 12 stone and 10st. 7lbs. I shall have a note ready for you presently to send to Sir John, to get leave to cut some barrow-loads of gorse on Ashton Common. We will see about putting up fences to-morrow morning; a regular training-ground will not come amiss if both these young ones turn up trumps."

And the master went back to his den, to concoct the note to Sir John and to send a favourable reply to Ruby's request.

"He must have a name, my dear boy," the letter concluded; "enter him as 'Lord of the Valley,' since he is the hope of the Old Vale; he is by King Tom out of Baroness. Also, you may as well, to make sure of a mount, enter the young Ethelbert horse with the queer knees; he is in better condition than the other, though not such a good one when both are fit. He ran on the flat as Tomfool, so you must keep the proper name. If Ralph by any means can come down to 12 stone and likes him better than Baronet, he can have him as a second string, 7lbs. overweight. Meantime, come here on Thursday afternoon, get Ralph to bring Baronet also to carry 12 stone, and we'll put the lot through the mill."

And Mr. James Blake concluded with a flowery sketch of his own day's sport.

Peter and his master, as overseers to the gardener and a brace of labourers, employed Tuesday in laying out a very fair trial-course in the figure of 8, about a thousand yards in total length of the diagram, and a mile and a half in circuit. To go twice over this would be a good testing gallop; all grass, no water and no plough.

Ralph—though by no means flattered that his cousin

had so estimated Baronet's form as to leave it an open question whether a four-year-old like the Ethelbert might not be a better mount, even with the advantage of a stone—brought Baronet down by Thursday's rail to take his proposed part in the impending trial. The jockeys, peeling to their shirt sleeves, scaled in Jemmy's den; Ralph, who had done no wasting, 4lbs. overweight, and they proceeded to saddle and take a preliminary canter in the park.

Peter Mell's science alone was worth more than 7lbs. over his adversaries, let alone the fact that his horse carried 10st. 7lbs. only, and was in the better condition of the three.

Ralph, for the sake of the stain in Baronet's pedigree, which told upon his speed in a run in after a slow race, made the running hot, thinking to force the pace too strong for the stamina of four-year-olds; but the terrific stride of Lord of the Valley, and the immense stretch of ground which he covered at each fence, kept him at little more than a strong canter, close in the track of Baronet going his best; and though weight and want of condition showed a tale upon him as he came round the loop for the last time, he was able to answer to Ruby's call and go to Baronet's girths at an increased pace half a mile from home. The cousins raced neck-and-neck for the next 500 yards, when Peter closed with them, and the two thoroughbreds then, to Ralph's disgust, came clean away from Baronet, who did his best, but was quite out of it for speed. Ruby was of course no match for Peter at handling a finish, and the Tomfool, served by weight and jockeyship, shot out in the last dozen strides, and won cleverly by a length, Baronet thirty lengths to the bad.

"Not bad that for young uns, and half-trained, eh, Ralph?" said Jemmy, as he cantered up on Bellboro. "It seems almost a pity to put nags through the mill so short a time before a race, but really they haven't had much punishment, if any, and they are so short of work, that every gallop does them good."

"Good form," said Ralph; "they can improve a stone or two upon that and more. Baronet isn't quite fit either, but he is nearer than either of them. I'll ride Peter's mount on Saturday, if you don't mind, and we will win who can; though I don't see how we are to beat Ruby when we come to a stone and a half worse terms."

"You've got a good thing there by next month, Master, if ye don't spile it," said Peter Mell, as he held Jemmy's horse in the stable-yard. "Show him up a bit in a hunters' race, and get him in the Liverpool at 10 stone, and it's money made, surely;" and Peter smacked his lips in prospect of a robbery and long odds against an unknown animal.

But Jemmy had a more immediate ambition.

"Hand us the *Calendar*," he said to Ralph, as they reached the library. "Entries close to-day, by jingo! we'll telegraph at once to Weatherby's;" and ringing the bell for a groom to be ready to ride at once to the railway, concocted a telegram under Ralph and Ruby's auspices, entering Lord of the Valley, 4 years, by King Tom out of Baroness, and Tomfool, each for the Hunt Plate and Croydon Cup of the forthcoming meeting on the 20th instant; and Tomfool, in addition, for the open handicap on the second day.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### LAYING SIEGE.

**M**ATTERS had gone steadily and quietly at the Maule for the last three weeks. Georgie and Lady Mary's routine consisted of orderly drives, casual calls, and occasional small social dinner-parties, organised especially when Jemmy happened to be running down for a day, and to be available to perform the ceremonial for gentlemen.

The only anomalous feature that presented itself to a critical observer was the frequent sojourn of Algernon Paget at the Wroughton rectory; his friendship for his brother-in-law seemed to have developed to an intensity during the fall of the leaf, and hard rider though he professed himself to be, a patron of grass and abjurer of cramped countries, he had lately discovered that the agricultural district of Orleton could show as good sport in their way as the pastures of the Vale; and extra distant though they were from the rectory, no meets seemed to suit his taste better than those of each Saturday. He now



kept a horse exclusively at the rectory for the patronage of the Orleton Hunt, and thus securing a fourth day to the week, found his sport on the Saturday a convenient excuse for staying over the Sunday.

Diligently he attended church on the Sabbath, and inasmuch as the chancel-seats were generally crowded with the quiverful from the rectory, he had gladly on the first Sunday accepted Lady Mary's good-natured signal that he would find space in the Maule pew, and had summoned courage after service to crave leave to occupy the same quarters on similar occasions, so long as the Maule household was thus limited in numbers.

He had generally found excuse to look in upon Lady Mary during the Sunday afternoon, or take a social cup of tea, to his own abhorrence and ruin of digestion, as a stop-gap between afternoon church and late dinner; and on the last Sunday of all, by a wonderful stroke of diplomacy, he had succeeded in getting himself invited off-hand to the Maule Sunday dinner, on the plea that the rector was detained by an extra evening service till a nine o'clock supper, which was too late for the regime of a man of Mr. Paget's regular habits.

Somehow these Saturday outings of this gentleman's had seldom or never clashed with Jemmy Blake's impromptu visits. Paget kept himself well *au fait* as to Jemmy's whereabouts, and knew within ten minutes if he had driven on a Saturday past the rectory on his way from the station to the Maule. Not that he for one instant feared or suspected him as a rival, but he could not but feel himself at times held in check and unlionised by Jemmy's dry yet easy-going style of conversation, and

reminiscences of the Warrener *fiasco* made him feel small in Georgie's eyes if the subject turned on horseflesh. On the whole, circumstances had flown auspiciously, according to Mr. Paget's own views, during his sojourn at the rectory. He had begun a siege in earnest, and to all appearances the approaches were by no means so formidable as he had at first anticipated ; his first lodgment had been simply and easily effected, and he stood now upon social if not distinctly intimate terms with the Maule family. Mr. Paget was always reputed an agreeable man in ladies' society. He had plenty of conventional *savoir-faire*, facility for conversation, aptitude for *politesse* without being ever guilty of glaring or fulsome compliments ; could sing without destroying the digestions of his audience *au* Jack Marshall, was an unexceptionable performer in a ball-room ; and could crown his accomplishments with a decidedly presentable *personnel*, standing a little over five feet ten inches in his stockings, well made and well proportioned, invariably *bien chaussé* and *bien ganté*, and on the whole an ornament to the art of his tailor and bootmaker.

The ladies would, as a rule, remark him as a handsome man, and admire his regular features, clear complexion, well-trimmed flaxen moustache and whiskers. His enemies among mankind, and of course he had some, would style him waxen-faced, artificial, a tailor's "dummy ;" but though a human being can by strenuous exertion and unselfishness get to be acknowledged as "useful" by the world at large, who ever heard of that individual who was candidly owned "ornamental" by both sexes ?

But even if certain sections of humanity were not fully

satisfied with Mr. Algernon Paget, none could deny that he was ever thoroughly pleased with himself.

And never was he happier with himself and his *savoir-faire*, than when on the Saturday succeeding the "trial" at the Vale House he pulled up at the Maule gates on his return from a most indolent standstill day with the Orleton hounds, and entered into conversation with Lady Mary and Georgie, who had at that moment pulled up in the britzka while the lodge-woman removed obstacles.

Greeting, gossip, and compliments checked progress for some few minutes, Paget flushing the conversation boldly whenever it tended to hang fire, and in no way disposed to break off the interview until he had sifted every device to get himself invited to 5-P.M. tea, a poison which, on any other pretence, he would not have swallowed or even countenanced at any price.

Patience earned its own reward, and joyfully Paget closed with the offer when it came. Leaving his hunter in charge of a groom, he sat patiently in the falling twilight, while the ladies deposited grebe hats and sealskins up stairs, then came to rejoin him in the library.

Studiously, like a tame cat, he handed tea-cups, stirred the fire, and made himself generally useful. When propriety could no longer countenance his delay and the rectory dinner-hour was fast falling due, he rose to bid his adieux, and pricked up his ears, as he fished for his whip and gloves in the hall, to hear Lady Mary say to her charge :

"You must go alone to lunch with the Kenilworths on Monday, my dear ; I forgot I had invited old Mrs.

Curzon that very day on her way from the Lakes. She stays with us till Thursday ; I must be at home to receive her. Make my excuses. Had you not better ride ? The exercise is better than a cold drive."

Paget could not find a plea to hang on longer to hear Georgie's reply ; but taking the offchance of her acquiescence in the plan, climbed into his saddle, and laid his plans accordingly as he jogged home.

The blood bay that did weekly duty for him in the Orleton ploughs had seen but little service that Saturday, and it was no anomaly, so far as stable dealings were concerned, to field him out again on the Monday for old Colonel Wickham's harriers, who, as luck would have it, were to meet at the Cross-keys, six miles on the road to Lord Kenilworth's seat. The only curiosity which opened the eyes of the rector and stud-groom equally was, that a professed sportsman like Algernon Paget should prefer a pottering day with a currant-jelly pack to the allurements of Keston Gorse on that same day, the crack meet of the whole Vale country. Whatever may have been their suspicions as to Paget's failing nerve and energy, they had none of the real motive and cause of action, as that gentleman trotted off rather late, about 10 A.M., to seek the currant-jellies.

It was not his policy to waylay Miss Warren on her journey out ; time would then be short with her, converse at a discount, and his own excuse for being in the path at best but a lame one. He might as well kill two birds with one stone, and enjoy a morning canter over easy country before proceeding to *majora negotia*.

So he struck off, and found the harriers winding

vaguely after a matutinal puss, enjoyed his canter and his lunch, and was thoroughly pleased with himself and his diplomacy, till, about 2.30 P.M., to his utter dismay, his two-hundred-guinea mount put his foot in a rabbit-hole on Bell Down, and came down a burster, soiling Mr. Paget's shoulders, and unmistakably ricking his own. There was no error about it : the blood bay grew lamer and lamer at the shoulder-joint during the next half-hour ; and making the best of a bad job, Paget, while he cursed his fall and his luck, dismounted, and led his horse from the rest of the field in the direction of the Orleton main-road, along which Miss Warren must pass on her return.

He sat him down on the fifth mile-stone and converted two first-rate cabanas to cinders, and yet the vista of the road was a dead blank ; then, as at last he rose to re-tighten his girths, and, at the risk of ruining Musician for life, to remount and ride in the direction of the expected visitation, a habit fluttered round the corner of the hedgerow, and Miss Warren in the distance was cantering down the turf-border that fringed the macadamisation.

Slowly and with nonchalance Paget led his disabled steed on in the direction of Orleton, holding his hat in his hand, and, forearmed with a pocket-comb, from behind the shelter of the saddle sedulously combing out his whiskers and hair ere he should come under closer inspection.

With admirable surprise he turned round as the horse-hoofs rattled up to him, and greeted Miss Warren with no less show of astonishment than *empressment*.

" How strange to meet you here, Miss Warren ! Have

you been out looking for the colonel's hounds? I have just left them the other side of Bell Down."

"Oh no, Mr. Paget, I never hunt. Papa doesn't approve of it. I have only been out for lunch at Lord Kenilworth's."

"Really!" in great surprise.

"Yes; and how came you in this country to-day? I thought you would be sure to have gone to Keston Gorse; Jemmy says it is the best meet that he knows anywhere, a sure find, and no cover within miles."

"Well, it was a bit of chance. I thought last night was such a stormy one that foxes might have left small shelter like that for high woods, and it would have been a sell to draw it blank; so I stayed here for a canter with Colonel Wickham instead; and I am sure I have no cause to regret it, have I?" he added, looking very tenderly up at the young lady, and modulating his voice, as he judged, to an exquisite pathos.

"I don't know," said Georgie simply; "you see, you haven't said what sort of a day you have had. I suppose it has been a good one. I see you have had a fall," she added, as she scanned Paget's muddy shoulders.

"Got tripped in a rabbit-hole, and I have lamed my horse, and rather shaken myself too," he added mendaciously, hoping to enlist her sympathies.

"I am so sorry for you!" and Paget felt felicitated. "You are always having these unlucky falls!" she added in commiseration, and Paget winced and blushed in reminiscence of Warrener and the Close at the Maule. "Poor horse, it goes very lame indeed!" continued Georgie, reaching out her hand to stroke its ears.

"I wish I'd broke my collar-bone, by jingo," thought Paget; "it mends easy, and I'd have stayed at the rectory till I was sound; perhaps she would have patted me then, instead of this clumsy brute."

"I feel all the better for your kind sympathy, Miss Warren," said Algernon, taking off his beaver with studied effect.

"Where are the harrier-kennels?" said Georgie, thinking to start a line of conversation that would suit Mr. Paget's sporting proclivities.

"I don't know; they are not by the colonel's own house; somewhere by Bell Down, I think, where we have been to-day; then, trying to bring the conversation round to his own aim, he said, "It's a blind, heart-breaking country, this, is it not, Miss Warren?"

"Yes, I believe so; if I hunted I should prefer a grass country, I think, like the Vale; it must be great fun to hunt one's own hounds, like my Cousin Jemmy Blake."

"Would you really like to hunt hounds of your own, Miss Warren? You could do that very easily, if you liked," said the gentleman.

"I hunt hounds! Nonsense! ladies can't manage that sort of thing; very few can even ride at all to them—I can't, for one."

"You have never tried, have you? I could teach you, I am sure; would you like it?"

"Oh dear no; you are very kind, Mr. Paget," said Georgie, rather puzzled with him. "Papa does not approve of my hunting at all; he thinks it dangerous. He did once offer to let me go with Jemmy Blake's, but my

cousin hates ladies mounting, on his own account, so it came to nothing."

"What a mistake!" said Paget, half to himself.—  
"Look here, Miss Warren;" screwing his courage to the point and clearing his throat; "what I was thinking of was this: now my house, you know, is in the best part of the Vale country, and there is plenty of room for a pack of harriers for you to hunt yourself, and——"

"Goodness me!" broke in Georgie, half embarrassed, "we have passed the turning to the station, and it's past four o'clock;" and she pulled up short. "Good-bye, Mr. Paget," holding out her hand.

"Why, isn't this your way home?"

"I have to telegraph to London for Lord Kenilworth, and I am late now."

"Let me do it for you; it is no use sending you out of your way—unless," he added confusedly, "it is private business."

"Oh no; a coal-truck of his has been shunted at the wrong place, and he is in a fearful state at having no Ruabon coals to burn in his study. But your horse is so lame; I must go myself."

"Couldn't you send your groom? he could soon overtake us again," said Paget, as a last resource.

"Oh, he can't write well enough, I am afraid, and we should go home round by the village, not come back all this way; good-bye!" and she cantered off.

"Just my luck!" said Paget, sulkily. "Come up, you brute!" he grunted as he scrambled into his saddle in disgust at his interruption.

"Poor man!" thought Georgie, "I quite forgot to



say I hoped he would soon be well. His fall must have shaken him ; he was quite stupid—talked nonsense. Me hunt hounds ! What would papa say ? I wonder if he is at all queer ? ” she cogitated. “ That fall from Warrenner may have affected his spine or his brain ; he used not to be so odd, and talk such nonsense. Really, Jemmy should not play such dangerous tricks with his friends.





## CHAPTER XVIII.

### COLLEGE GRINDS.

**Q**N the same Saturday on which Algernon Paget had wriggled himself into afternoon tea at the Maule, and there laid his plans to waylay Georgie on the Monday, Jemmy Blake, Ruby, and Ralph, at 11 A.M., were jogging down the High at Oxford, towards Magdalen Bridge, each mounted on a sort of three-cornered jumping Oxford hack, and got up in business-like style, in white cords and boots, or gaiters, according to fancy, as if for an early spell at the "drag."

It was evident that something was "up" that morning: every available quadruped in the whole range of livery-stables had been bespoke forty-eight hours in advance; groups of men had been congregating in riding-costume at every college-gate; some thirty blood-like nags, sheeted and hooded, had been led on by stable-helpers at intervals since breakfast; the turnpike at Magdalen Bridge had done a roaring trade; known riding-men were conspicuous

by their absence from lecture-rooms after eleven had struck the round of Oxford chimes, and the midday tutors of Christchurch found their rooms utter blanks, rows of chairs tenantless, and themselves at a complete discount.

On the whole, the preparation for the college grinds at Cuddesden had been made with as much secrecy as could be preserved about a fixture that was privately public to at least all members of the university *in statu pupillari*, and a matter of tacit cognizance to a large proportion of dons who, though they could not compromise their own status and dignity by looking on and sharing in the sport, did not go out of their way to discountenance the gathering, or to hound-on stricter authorities less *au fait* at the manners and customs of the times, to take up the scent, and prosecute enquiries into transgressions which were, on the whole, harmless so long as nominally perpetrated under the rose.

Proctors, however, were less to be depended on than tutors ; the dynasty of the year was by no means a popular one : not content with prosecuting error when it came directly under their noses, they had taken, in many instances, malicious pleasure in persecuting and visiting mere nominal *lâches* which had, from time immemorial, been tacitly condoned by predecessors. They had overhauled the statutes, and instituted a crusade against billiard-rooms, and such of their patrons whom they could find in these purlieus before the nominally licensed hour of 1 P.M. ; and great was the harvest to the university chest ; for, in consequence of the virtual abrogation of the statute for so many years, the tables in the town had always been crowded from breakfast to lunch-time with

idlers and loungers who had no appetite for lectures or reading on their own account.

Then, as a next step, the *ephors* of the year had taken their stand in summer afternoons at Magdalen Bridge, and fined wholesale every unsuspecting patron of a pony-chaise who had chartered a basket-carriage to convey himself and comrades to Cowley cricket-ground, as a more inexpensive means of locomotion than a hansom with its limited space and charge each way of 2s. 6d. No one had ever thought of a formal peregrination to a proctor, with a document of "license to drive" counter-signed by his tutor, as a preparatory step to embarking in one of the standard wicker-machines of the livery-stables; it was not as if he had been going to charter a dog-cart for the afternoon—then, as a precaution, leave might have been secured; but this onslaught on unprotected pony-traps was looked upon in the same light as the systematic capture of fishing-smacks and trawlers would have been in the naval blockade of the beginning of the last century.

And as the *coup de grâce* to unpopularity, one of the most energetic of the band had stalked and unearthed sundry unsuspecting evil-doers; not in his official robes and orthodox green velvet, but sacrilegiously, a cat unbelled, sneaking up streets in his shirt-sleeves, in a shabby hat, his robes of office lumbering with him in a bag simulating a wandering waiter of the period off duty from some neighbouring public.

Small wonder, then, that the saturnalia of the Sheldonian Theatre freely, and with open mouth, expressed the public disapprobation of such unsportsmanlike proceedings—

worse than liming a trout-stream or shooting a hare in her form, scandalous as vulpicide, and surreptitious as night-poaching. In vain did the vice-chancellor signal for order, in vain did deputations strive to lull the dissonant yells of condemnation—*vox populi* gained its point, and ere the patient public orator could have his say, the two more obnoxious of the proctorhood were pressed to sacrifice their dignity to the cause of public convenience, and retire with ignominy from the edifice. Then was the “gods’” wrath pacified.

But with such marplot make-mischiefs as these on the wing, no wonder that there were misgivings among many of the “sportsmen” who rode to the course that day, and Ralph, as the trio jogged up the Cowley-road, remarked,

“I did not think that Rake of the Tavern was such a fool. I suppose he has no risk to fear for himself, and he does not think about putting those infernal proctors on a general scent. There was that filly of his, which I suppose he is going to run in the Open Scurry, being led down the High just now with a five-pound racing-saddle and white surcingle on her back, staring everyone in the face. I’ll take short odds there’s an ambuscade in St. Clement’s as we come back.”

The ground at Cuddesden was better laid out than the generality of courses for Oxford grinds. The “house” had done its duty and justice to itself. Instead of straggling, impervious, agricultural fences, such as those of Bletchington or Baldon, with casual gaps aided by a bill-hook, to enable the horses to tail in single file through the only available egress, fences that a donkey might carefully creep though or under, but which were very

handy to trip a steeplechaser if, deceived by the daylight visible through them, he chanced them, and sought to go through them, the obstacles were nicely and neatly put up, nothing blind or puzzling, nothing straggling or seductive, everything requiring jumping, but nothing beyond a fair hunting-fence. An artificial brook had been built up over a rivulet, and was crossed twice in the line ; but as a matter of course, the undergraduates had not arrived at the simple plan of making some circuit of a mile and a half, with every fence carefully prepared and visible from the centre of the course, do duty by repetition for long as well as short distance races, and save expense of rental for the day to boot.

The whole distance laid out was a ring of good three miles, mounting the hill towards the village, in the middle of the course, and with a run in on a ridge-and-furrow water-meadow, on the bank of the Thame.

The march of civilisation during the last few years had superseded the antique system of catch-weight for all races, and livery hacks as competitors for four-fifths of the programme.

The days of impromptu catch-weight matches and sweeps over the inimitable fences of Wendlebury were now unknown ; beardless striplings were, or professed to be, as cunning at weight for age and the science of handicapping as the most wary of turf *habitués* ; no match could be made without the scales ; a whole evening would be spent in haggling over the difference of three pounds in the terms of a race between two livery screws, over Charlie Symonds' farm, and the jockeys would give and receive weight from each other, according to prowess in

former grinds and reputation with the drag, as systematically and gravely as gentlemen from professionals in a Hunt Cup.

The "correct card" of the day set forth a business-like programme of six races. The "close" races consisted of the Challenge Whip and plate of 100 sovs. for nags, the property of, and ridden by, Christchurch men; a welter plate on similar terms, and a flat and hurdle race open to any horse, but similarly restricted as to nomination and jockeyship. The open races consisted of a flat scurry of a sov. each, and a steeplechase of 3 sovs. each, 20 added, 11st. 7lbs. each, eight subscribers, on terms which have been already set forth in Ruby's letter to his cousin.

The racing on the whole was good for undergraduate chasing. True, in the grand college race all refused more or less except the second, a steady, plodding, half-bred hunter, who ganged his ain gait from first to last, but who was unable to hold the advantage that his honest way of facing his fences had at one time gained for him, and being caught up by a shifty, swerving thoroughbred fifty yards from home, he was beaten half a length, after a lolloping set-to on both sides that of course called forth eulogies from bystanding connoisseurs, who loudly applauded the winner for his *inimitable* (as in truth it was) "rush on the post."

The welter race, contested mainly by seasoned hunters, had less refusals but even less pretensions to pace than the predecessors. Then came the open steeplechase, for which the jockeys had long ago scaled in eager anticipation. Ralph, having starved and wasted himself to 11st. 13lb.,

rode Tomfool at 6lbs. overweight on a 4lb.-saddle, in which limited piece of pigskin, as might be expected of an amateur jockey of twenty-one, he did not enhance the chances of his mount so much as if he had condescended to carry a few pounds extra in the shape of a more roomy saddle,

It was generally supposed that there was something "up" about the Merton nominations, and the beardless connoisseurs scanned the two carefully as they paraded the starting-fields, sheeted to the hocks and carefully watched by Peter Mell and an underling. All the information that could be extracted from that worthy was, "that master could do so if he liked, but it was ne'er a use, he could see, running four-year-olds agin aged 'osses at even weights, and as fat as butter too."

To Peter's disgust there was not a semblance of a ring or "lists;" nor any visible chance of getting on an "honest" penny upon the "good things" which he feared were being thus ruthlessly exposed to the Oxonian world.

He confided his disappointment to Ralph when the latter came up to saddle, and he good-naturedly introduced him to the only approach to a bookmaker—a sporting tobacconist of Oxford—who, sitting on an unmistakable Oxford hack, was laying liberally the odds of 3 to 2 to all Christchurch comers against their representative and favourite, Mayfair.

After a good deal of haggling, and counting the finances of his breeches-pocket, Peter managed to get 10 sovs. to 3 against Ruby's mount, Lord of the Valley, and retired to watch the start, growling at his luck and his inability to



obtain the 12 or 15 to 1 which he had fondly hoped would be readily forthcoming against the unknown four-year-old.

The race was like most college grinds, of the very simplest description ; six competitors sported silk, faced the starter, and got away to a very straggling start, one horse refusing at the first fence, and the whole lot in Indian file by the time they reached the second.

The rider of Mayfair had planned for himself, as do most embryo amateurs who pride themselves upon their powers of finishing, to ride a waiting-race, and having of course no estimate of pace, was not in the least alarmed to see the two four-year-olds sailing a field in front of him, at a pace after all little better than a superior canter, and each hard held ; judging the facility of making up lost ground by the preceding hunters' races, he quietly bided his time till half the course had been run and the turn been made under the village. When he tried to "come," he found to his surprise that the leaders only went the faster, and Ralph, being under orders not to bully or break 'Tomfool's heart unnecessarily, did not uselessly contest matters when, three fences from home, Ruby, in obedience to a hint *en passant* from Peter Mell, slacked his pull somewhat, and letting Lord of the Valley have his own way, left the stable companion and his 6lbs. extra labouring up to his fetlocks in a juicy pasture, and coming away still further and faster, cantered in, hands down, a hundred and fifty yards to the good, having sat well and still the whole way round, buried deep in the hollows of a gigantic hunting-saddle as big as himself.

By the time that he had weighed in "all right," the

"coming" Mayfair "finished" viciously for the third place, a field in the rear of the pulling-up Tomfool.

The college hurdle-races, the flat race, and open scurry were got through with laudable punctuality, not more than an hour behind the time specified on the card ; and a drizzling rain had sent, hours in advance, all who were not especially interested in the last ; but Ruby and his cousin had stayed on for the scurry, for which they brought out Tomfool a second time, and Ruby, getting a good start and the inside all the turns, won cleverly by a length.

By the time that they had got to their hacks and got on to the Wheatley-road, it was dusk, rain falling heavily, and the roads a sea of water.

As they passed, at a twelve-miles-an-hour trot, the portion at the end of the Magdalen ground, a muddy figure shot from under the palings, and racing in the slush alongside of them, called Ralph by name.

"Ware proctors, Mr. Romilly ! There's such a tribe of them at the pike !"

"Oxford George, eh ?" said Ralph, as he pulled up and peered through the gloom at the tattered ruffian alongside of him.

"Yes, Sir ; old George, Sir ! You won't forget George, will you, Sir ? They've stopped all the gentlemen as they came in, and, thinks I, 'I knows there's Mr. Romilly a-comin' ;' so I run back to tell yer." And the ruffian ducked and grinned for his expected reward.

"Well, you've earned half-a-crown !" said Ralph, fishing out one, and then turning to the others, held a council of war.

In a few seconds more, Jemmy jogged solitary on his way to the town, and the cousins retreated to the inside bar of the Bull and Flag, leaving the horses in charge of Oxford George.

Jemmy had scarcely pulled up at the barrier at Magdalen-bridge when his rein was rudely seized by an officious scout, and a gowned figure under a gigantic umbrella demanded his name and college.

"My good man," said Jemmy blandly to the cad who had hooked on to his rein, tapping him gently across his dripping proboscis with the tip of his cutting-whip, "if you are not a highwayman, and do not want your beauty spoilt, do you not think it would be safer to keep your hands to yourself?" And the bull-dog, finding the taps upon his proboscis coming more frequent and fast in rhythmical accompaniment to Jemmy's oration, took the hint and loosed the bridle of Jemmy's passive screw. Then the latter, turning to the interrogating proctor, with admirable surprise and composure, haughtily added, "I have nothing for you, my good woman. Oh, it is you again, Mr. What's-your-name, is it? Really, I wish you could remember me, or at least what is due to me. This is the second time within a month that you have annoyed me by your officious interference." And kicking his heels into the hack's ribs he jogged on again.

It did not take many minutes to charter a decent-looking family four-wheeler from King-street, and to commit his horse to a hanger-on to be led to his stable.

By the time that the "growler" reached the Bull and Flag, Ralph and Ruby had squared matters with the landlady; and each disguising his upper works with a

decent bonnet and cloak, sat well back in the fly, and without further molestation ran the gauntlet of the proctor and his myrmidons, who turned a bull's-eye upon the occupants of the fly as it passed the gate, but withdrew it at once, with ample apologies to the wearer of the decent widow's cap and bonnet and the blooming daughter alongside. The hacks followed, five minutes later, with Oxford George ; and though the empty saddles caused suspicions that all was not right as to their late occupants, the time was past and the scent too far away for any cast after the lost prey.

"You rode like a bird to-day, young un," said Jemmy, as the trio settled down after dinner round the fire in Ralph's lodgings. "If you will manage to keep yourself in condition, you shall have the mount next week at Croydon.—You can't get the weight, Ralph, by some pounds," said he, turning to the other cousin ; "you don't do so well, excuse my saying so, in a 4lbs. as in a 7lbs. one, and it's no good carrying seven or eight pounds over weight."

And the next step was to enclose a guinea to Weatherby's, and register the assumed name of "Mr. Ruby" in time for the forthcoming sheet of the *Calendar*.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### PLANTING.

“**T**HAT was a smartish nag of yours to-day!” said a portly, well-to-do-looking individual at Peter Mell’s elbow, as the latter lapped his third go of cold gin at the bar of the Greyhound at Croydon, on the evening of the Thursday in the steeplechase week, and chuckled silently over his successes of the day.

Peter turned round to take stock of his neighbour—six-foot-three and broad-shouldered, dressed in honest-looking broadcloth, a substantially-built drab overcoat, and shepherd’s plaid continuations, a massive and ruddy countenance, that would have done credit to a first-class butcher or grazier of the period, topped with a broad-brimmed, business-like, horsey-looking shovel-hat, and a profusion of jewelry on his waistcoat, neckcloth, and rather soiled hands, that seemed hardly in consonance with the farmer-like cut of the rest of his *tout ensemble*. Such was Mr. Joseph Bacon, better-known in the racing-

world of later years as the "Elephant," from the gigantic nature of his physique and his speculations.

Not for many years past had Mr. Bacon been seen to condescend to such small game as bag-betting and ready-money ring investments. He had his own respectable-looking betting-agency in an offshoot of the Haymarket, whence his clerks sent out weekly lists of prices, and on receipt of cash laid the market odds to any publican, flunkey, or counterskipper, who felt that his knowledge of horseflesh warranted him to risk investment upon the futile selections of the daily-paper racing-prophets. But Mr. Bacon's ring transactions were on a far more colossal scale. He had never less than a "thirty-thousand" book on the Derby, Leger, Chester Cup, or a great autumn handicap; he dealt *vivà voce* with hardly any but the millionaire backers and plungers of the turf; preferred to simplify matters, by laying the odds in all cases to a "monkey" at the least, and scarcely deigned to open his mouth to a modest "pony."

No safer draw was there in the whole ring than Mr. Bacon on a Monday's settling at Tattersall's. So long as his portly figure was there as a centre-piece, it seemed indeed futile for plungers to contemplate the oft-canvassed but very problematical feat of breaking the ring.

And though strictly punctual in all his payments, and essentially a worshipper of the mammon of unrighteousness, Mr. James Bacon was by no means a hard creditor for "swells" who had had a bad week of it, whose promise would be safe to hold good sooner or later, and to whom a request for "time" was often freely granted by the Elephant, to the disappointment of the Lost Tribes

and the sixty-per-cent. fraternity, on whom otherwise would the impecunious swell have had to fall back, had time and space been denied him to look around him, and consult his title-deeds, and face his solicitor, instead of the accommodation offices of Clifford and Old Burlington-streets.

Like most members of the ring, Mr. Bacon, great though he now was in every sense, had had a small beginning. His father had left him a petty, yet decent, business as a pork-butcher in a midland borough; but Mr. Bacon junior's proclivities for horseflesh and horse-racing were incompatible with that strict attention to business which alone should command success. His trade and custom fell through with neglect, and the *Gazette* announced the failure. With a few pounds scraped together from the ruins of his trade, Mr. Bacon, so soon as he was duly whitewashed, started business as a small ready-money bookmaker, and list-keeper, outside the ring, as a matter of course, for a commencement. Careful attention to the new profession, which, unlike the butcher's shop, carried his heart with it, soon enabled him to raise his head a little, open a hundred-pound book on great races, frequent the sporting publics of a large manufacturing midland town, and take his place duly inside the ring at all race-meetings. Strict punctuality in his dealings, coupled with judicious and fortunate speculation, soon aggrandised him, and moving south to the metropolis, he was before long a well-known *habitué* of Tattersall's, and the newly-built Victoria. Within six years of his new start in life, he was one of the best recognised and safest men of the ring. Strict integrity in

all his money-dealings, counterbalanced by unlimited cunning and chicanery in all matters relevant to horseflesh (for Mr. Bacon was now owner of a nag or two of his own, and was "in the swim" with many other owners), speedily augmented his capital. And a carefully-roped and bottled animal, that dropped like a meteor upon the racing public for the Chester Cup, "skinned the lamb" for Mr. Bacon, landed every bet standing in his book, and placed to his credit at his banker's by that one single coup a goodly balance of sixty thousand pounds.

To him that had was given still more ; for not only did Mr. Bacon's gigantic yet carefully-conducted bookmaking annually turn over his capital in a pleasant way, but he had, moreover, facilities for pulling the strings of his own puppets, and betting often not upon fickle chance, but luxurious certainty. Needy backers who were in default to the Elephant paid him in kind, if not in cash, when they entered long-expected "good things" in the great handicaps, kept them in the market by fictitious outlay till Mr. Bacon had milked every available penny that the confiding public could be tempted to invest, and then scratched the animal, to do duty another time, and to clear the way for some other nag, with the owner of whom Mr. Bacon was "standing in." Of course the public cried out over their burnt fingers, when the pen went through the favourite's name, the lackeys of the sporting press condemned or excused the transaction according to the direction of their fees ; and wiser turfites shook their heads, and said of the peccant owner of the scratched animal—who in palmier days, till the swine had plundered



his patrimony, had prided himself to "go straight"— "What's the poor devil to do when he gets into the hands of the bookmakers?" It would be odd, if, with so many milkcans to drain, so many puppets to play with, and such an extensive "legitimate" business, Mr. Bacon did not get rich; and very rich he had got; he would have been bought up cheap at a hundred thousand, though Peter Mell, in his jockey days, could well remember many a sovereign and half-sovereign invested with the former outsider, who then thought no scorn of such petty sums.

Peter had been out of the way of the world for some half-dozen years, and at first hardly recognised in the gigantic and bloated dimensions of the Elephant, the once sparer though ever-sturdy frame of the midland bookmaker.

But the Elephant had hours ago in the Croydon paddock divined Peter's identity, and wondered who, after so many years of absence and obscurity, had employed him as a trainer, when he saw him superintending the final toilet of Tomfool.

The aforesaid animal had done as much and more than had been expected of him. Jemmy Blake, to gratify his Cousin Ralph, who was to ride Tomfool in the Hunt Cup, had entered the horse for that, as also his handicap engagement, in Ralph's name, but had put Lord of the Valley in his own.

The field for the Hunt Cup had been of the very weakest description, nothing in it beyond Tomfool that ought to have fetched three figures at auction, and Ralph, who really could ride, when he would not try to perform his

long limbs in toy-saddles, won in the simplest of canters by three or four lengths, which might have been increased to a quarter of a mile without turning a hair of Tomfool. Both the horses had improved wonderfully during the last two weeks, under Peter's care, and neither could any longer be accused of being "too big."

In the big open handicap the handicapper had honoured Tomfool with 10st. 6lbs., a decidedly lenient impost for a "maiden" over a country, of whom nothing bad or good was yet known, but not unwarranted by his later and slower performances on the flat, or as a three-year-old.

The horse ran for the handicap next day, ridden by Peter Mell, at the special request of Ruby, who persuaded Jemmy not to pay forfeit, but to run it out for his, Ruby's, benefit on the offchance. Probably no one in the ring backed him for a sixpence except Ralph, who, having backed his own mount, according to his custom, for a "pony" the day before, threw away, as he said, a tenner for luck, upon Ruby's fancy, at twenty to one. Ruby had pleaded hard to be allowed the mount for himself; but Jemmy, fearing the danger of a large field, flatly refused; and Peter, who, seeing that the young one won with at least two stone in hand the day before, could not blind himself that the animal had an outside chance, for he had never yet been fully extended; and though he had but little faith in the jockeyship of Ruby or any other "genelman" rider, he had an improved estimate of his own powers, and sunk a sovereign or two of his winnings of the day before upon the horse's second essay.

Neither Jemmy nor Ruby had any predilection for betting, and, luckily for Ruby, at least half the field were only "airing" themselves for future engagements; two or three more were hopelessly outclassed, and when the first round had been completed, and the sensation water-jump cleared the second time, there were only four left in it—Tomfool and three out of the only remaining ones that had been "going for the money," one of the favourites having fallen early in the race.

Peter's hand had lost none of its cunning, though his nerve, without judicious priming, was no longer so firm in a hurrying, scurrying crowd of horses as it had wont to be in old days; he secured the inside turn as they came into the racecourse, stuck well to Charity Boy, who had been "stopped" all the previous spring, and carried at five to two all the money of the "swells" that day, and coming with a Chifney or Challoner rush in the last few strides, landed the four-year-old, who ran game, though beat from the distance, a winner by a neck.

The upper ten of course looked black at the "pot" which had been upset; and the ring cheered uproariously at the victory of the rank outsider. So soon as speculation had settled down for the future events, it dawned upon the public that Tomfool was among the entries for the Croydon Cup on the third day, for which his performance of the day, if it had not made him stale, would give him an undeniable chance; and it was in reference to this that Mr. Bacon now essayed to open a conversation with Peter Mell.

While the trainer was contemplating the colossus, and pondering in his own mind whether any of the trifling

sums which he had unfortunately left behind him unpaid when he made his exit from the turf as a trainer and bookmaker, had been debited to the Elephant, the latter, receiving no immediate reply to his introductory remark, again took up his parable, and said,

"Rare little nag that you rode to-day, Mr. Mell ; gave 'em all a turn-up, didn't you ?"

"Yes, we won handy," said Peter shortly, relieved to find that the Elephant had no cognizance of, nor made allusion to, former defaults.

"Did your party back him for much?" asked the Elephant. "He started a longish price ; nobody seemed to fancy him ; a man might have won a pot of money if he knew what he was about."

"Didn't skin a monkey the lot of us," said Peter bitterly ; "chucked away a real good thing. Mr. Blake never bets like, and Mr. Romilly had only a pony or so on, and I got two quid on at twenties ; sich waste I never seed in my life ;" and Peter sighed into his tumbler as he consoled himself.

"Hadn't you ever put him through the mill, to know what he could do?" asked the Elephant, in blank astonishment at such mismanagement of, to him, the gifts of Providence.

"He hadn't more nor a month's trainin' from the hunt-in'-stables," said Peter evasively ; "and it was no use of askin' questions and galloping his heart out at the last week, afore he were quite fit."

"Come in and sit down, Mr. Mell," said the Elephant, seeing that one or two listeners were beginning to congregate and prick their ears ; among them

"Tiresias," sporting augur of the *Morning Mail*, and one or two other reporters, on the *qui-vive* for any tittle-tattle that they might pick up to add to the week's lineage.

So Peter and the Elephant ensconced themselves over the fire in a snug little back-parlour; and the Elephant, first producing some substantial-looking cigars, offered one to the trainer, and lit a second for himself; then calling for a mulled bottle of best old port, sank back in his arm-chair, and contemplated Peter as the latter sucked diligently at his tobacco, and waited thirstily for the coming brew.

"And so you wasted the good thing, Mr. Mell," said the Elephant commiseratingly. "Dear heart! what a lot of money some folk could have made out of that little horse to be sure! stopped him all over the country, and got him in for a run of handicaps, all weights out at the same time, ten stone the first one, and seven pounds penalty for the rest! Dear! and some folk don't know when they have got a good thing."

"Ah, and that Charity Boy is a smartish 'oss too, aint he?" asked Peter.

"They tried him good enough to win with a stone more in hand—such a pot never was—lord, how the swells did drop!"

"And he'll go and win at Ealing next week, and show hisself off, and we sha'n't never get in under twelve stone again," growled Peter with an anathema.

"You've showed him off pretty well already, I reckon," said the Elephant; "there was nothing within twenty lengths of you two. Lord Dorset made no mistake—

barring your horse. Well, someone must win if other folk lose. We skinned it, as you know."

"I suppose so," said Peter sulkily.

"And he's like enough to win the Cup to-morrow?" said the Elephant interrogatively.

"Form's nigh good enough," said Peter evasively, smelling a rat. Though free to grumble over spilt milk, he was not the man to split upon a stable secret, even though Jemmy never condescended to bet, and almost the only person to participate in the spoil would be himself.

"Are you so sure that he can win?" asked the Elephant quietly.

"Nobody's sure till they're past the post," said Peter sapiently.

"Just so," said the Elephant; and he lit a second cigar, and filled Peter another tumbler of mulled port.

"Are you sure he aint a bit stale after his gruelling to-day?" he presently continued.

"Seems fresh enough in his box," said Peter; "feeds uncommon hearty."

"Cut and come again, eh?" said the Elephant.

"Ah, sure; he's a light-hearted 'oss; but he's none the worse for work; he run a stone better to-day than yesterday; that's why I didn't think he'd quite win the big race, though he did come in easy enough from them knacker's 'osses on Wednesday."

"I suppose your master aint the sort to stand in for a swim, is he?" said the Elephant, by way of a feeler.

Peter cogitated a moment, and then decided to tell the truth.

"Not he; he don't go for the brass—likes the 'sport,' as he calls it."

"How came you to train for him?" asked the Elephant, after a pause.

"I don't train regular; leastways, I'm stud-groom, and minds the hunters. It's only this season that master ever run one in a open race; he'd used to have a shoot once a-year for our hunters' race, but that was most all."

"It's a pity that you haven't got a regular racing-stud to manage, Mr. Mell," said the Elephant flatteringly. "If one may guess by the picture that little 'oss was to-day, and the way you had schooled him, you ought to make a sight of money for a master, and yourself too, if you had the stuff to work on, and could go your own way about it."

"Ah, sure!" assented Peter, meditating what this blarney had to do with the Cup on the morrow.

"Now, about this little 'oss for the Cup to-morrow," said the Elephant, feeling his way back to the point; "suppose you were not to run him — just suppose, I say."

"Ah!" said Peter, slowly and meditatively, "suppose, —ah!"

"Well, you see, Mr. Mell, it's just this," said the Elephant persuasively; "you know our horse, Fisherman—leastways, Mr. Knight's horse—it's all the same."

"Ah!" said Peter; "he's out of all form, aint he?" he added drily.

"Well, he *was*," said the Elephant, and then paused; "fact is, Mr. Mell, you know as well as I do he's a bit of

a gross horse ; some say, you know, between you and me, he was only a-*airing* of himself in the two-mile handi-cap yesterday ; but he'll run a deal better than that to-morrow."

"I should say he would," said Peter meditatively.

"Just so !" said the Elephant. "Now, Mr. Mell," he continued, "you're a man of business as well as me ; what's the use of our cutting each other's throats, and running the two horses off their legs against each other, for there aint anything else of any account in the race?"

"There's Physician," said Peter, beating about the bush.

"It's a mile too far for him, and he don't like such dirt."

"There's Meteor," said Peter ; "a smartish 'oss."

"Can't carry the weight," said the Elephant.

"And there's Charity Boy," continued the trainer.

"You beat him at even weights to-day ; and as a six-year-old, he'll have to give 16lbs. to-morrow, weight for age ; they aint likely to run him. Come, old chap, can't we square it between us?"

"Square what?" said Peter demurely.

"Look here, now !" said the Elephant, drawing his chair nearer to Peter and modulating his ponderous voice to a bellowing whisper, "look you here,—it's no use at all for us two to run against each other, that's flat ; our horse shall shunt for your'n, if your'n won't for ours. D'ye see ? are you game?"

"I'm game," said Peter, who saw his way.

"You're the sort !" said the Elephant ; "now look !—



which had we best shunt? You see, they'll make your horse favourite in the clubs to-night—not more than 6 to 4, I suppose, and it's a nice 6 to 1 against old Fisherman, after his airing. Best shunt yours if we can; one's as good as the other to win, but the price makes all the difference."

"How much to shunt our'n?" said Peter, sitting up and slapping his thigh with the air of a man who had made up his mind.

"A pony down, and you're on six ponies to nothing on Fisherman."

"Say two ponies down and bar the rest," said Peter, who did not see the use of the last part of the Elephant's offer.

"And yours don't run, or don't win—which?" said the Elephant.

"Can't say till I've seen my master," said Peter; "but anyhow, he's as safe as if he's boiled."

"Then we understand each other," said the Elephant grimly, pulling out a well worn note-case, and extracting thence a "twenty," a "ten," and four "fives."

"I understand," said Peter complacently.

"And I may trust you?" said the Elephant.

"He don't win if he do go to the post," said Peter decisively.

"Done!" said the Elephant, as he crushed his huge flabby paw with the notes into Peter's horny fist.

"Done!" said Peter, as he extricated his hand and pocketed the spoil.

"Good-night, then, Mr. Mell," said the Elephant, as he took a final pull at the mull, and shook himself like a

sleepy ox. "Should you like a tenner or so on old Fisherman? I'm just sending my mouse up to the clubs by the next train."

"Thankye kindly!" said Peter; "I'll wait for the ring to-morrow, I think; like enough the price will be as good, and better;" and the Elephant floundered off to send his commission by the next train.





## CHAPTER XX.

### THE CROYDON CUP.

**T**HE saddling-bell for the Croydon Cup had rung some minutes past ; metropolitan bobbies were sweeping a clearance to the course by means of a stout rope ; Ruby had already scaled, and was being escorted by Jemmy from the weighing room to the back of the paddock where Lord of the Valley was being paraded by Peter Mell, when Ralph came from the ring gateway, drew them aside, and said to Jemmy—

“You must give Tomfool a run for the money, too, Jemmy, or there will be all sorts of things said.”

“Things said !” quoth the unsophisticated James Blake ; “what’s the use of pulling him to pieces in the mud when Lord of the Valley can lose him at the weights ? You know that as well as I do.”

“Yes, I know that ; but I did not know that he had been backed all over London at 2 to 1, 6 to 4, and all sorts of short prices, last night and this morning. They’re

beginning to knock him about in the betting now. It's got wind in the ring that no one is weighing for him."

"What idiots the public must be!" said Jemmy sulkily. "Why should I risk laming my horse to accommodate a bundle of ignorant fools who bet upon what they know nothing about?"

"It can't be helped; all the sporting prophets went for him in the morning papers after his run yesterday; unless you buy them all up, they'll accuse you—or rather me, for he's entered in my name and colours—of 'milking' right and left, if only to vent their spleen for being sold out of the 'tip.' It's far simpler to let him run for the public money, and save a jaw and a long explanation. No one knows that the Lord of the Valley is in the same interest—he is entered in your name and colours; half the world will think we have scratched to swim in the same boat with Fisherman; they're making him favourite, now."

"What am I to do, then?" said Jemmy passively. "Hang it, there go the numbers!"

And the deep voice of the Elephant, at the corner of the betting-enclosure close by them, promptly opened with "6 to 4 on the field; 4 to 1 bar one!" and the small fry round him speedily took up the chorus of his parable.

"Tell Mell to weigh-in at once and ride him; he won't interfere with Ruby, but can't hurt as a second string." And Ralph, diving into the weighing-room to say a word to the clerk of the course, announced Tomfool's intention to start, and then hurried to see the number at once duly hoisted, which was done before the ring had had time

to settle fairly to prices, or to injure their books by a false price or false impression. Prices were at once revolutionised. "2 to 1 on the field!" "6 to 1 bar two!"

"Any odds against some of these runners!" was the modification of the chorus of Babel.

And Peter, having left Lord of the Valley and his toilet for the encounter at the discretion of Ralph Romilly, was struggling hurriedly into a pair of tops and doeskins in the jockey's deserted robing-room, when the colossal form of the Elephant darkened the doorway, and the hoarse, flabby voice whispered in Mr. Mell's ear—

"Number up, I see; you to ride; all square, of course!"

"We don't win nohow; don't you fret yourself, Mr. Bacon."

"Will ye have two ponies to a tenner about our nag?" asked the bookmaker; "it's a sweet price, and I'm throwing the money away to you: there's only twos against him in the ring."

"Thank ye kindly!" said Peter, looking down as he buckled his spurs; "but I'm on this long time," he added veraciously; for he had sunk all his winnings of the day before on Lord of the Valley, at 8's and 10's to 1 in the lists.

"On the square, then!" said the Elephant, as he backed out to return to Mammon in the betting-enclosure, and Peter, catching up his saddle and cloths, pushed in, better late than never, to the weighing-room, and chucking himself into the scale, called "eleven stone!"

"Mind, Peter," said his master, as the jockey settled down in his saddle and altered his stirrup-lengths, "win

by all means if you can, and if Mr. Charles is by any luck out of it; but don't go and ride your horse to pieces for a place if you find that we are winning anyhow without you."

"I know, master," said Peter, who was cursing his predicament, contemplating the extreme difficulty of serving both the M.F.H. and Mammon satisfactorily in the mount, and hoping with all his heart that Ruby would not lose his head or put the young one down, without which he could hardly lose, judging by the line through Tomfool; yet at the same time conscientiously determined, if necessary, to sacrifice his bargain with the Elephant rather than his integrity to his master, and thinking what hard lines it would be if he had not only to win after all, and lose his money invested on Lord of the Valley, but to refund as a matter of conscience the two "ponies" with which the Elephant had purchased the security of Fisherman from Tomfool. "If Mr. Blake were only a 'man of business!'" sighed Peter to himself, as he walked his horse out of the enclosure to follow the rest in their preliminary canter.

The heavy outlays upon Fisherman from his party had, with a fair share of public money, brought him to the head of the poll at 7 to 4, in a field of six. Queer though his running had been on the Wednesday, the tone of the market clearly indicated that he was meant this time; and shrewd observers noticed during his canter that the Chifney bit, which usually appeared when Fisherman was "shunting," was to-day replaced by a light powerful Pelham bridle.

The unceasing animosity of the Elephant against Tom-

fool caused many *habitues* to fancy that something was wrong, and the horse was eagerly scanned in his preliminary canter, which showed no symptoms of stiffness or staleness from the race of the day before. But for all the style of his canter, the "pencils" still worked busily against him, and 9 to 4 could be had almost anywhere.

Ralph, in whose name Tomfool ran, and who had already put a good hundred of his yesterday's plunder upon the Lord of the Valley, made no secret of his preference for his cousin's mount, telling every acquaintance whom he met that the "dark" Lord ought to win if he stood up; that Tomfool would do his best, but that, in his opinion, was held safe by his cousin's horse. This was not welcome news for a majority, who had already plunged at a short price either upon Fisherman or Tomfool. But most who received the news at least "saved" themselves upon the outsider; while an Aldershot division and a speculative clique of the Raleigh, taking Ralph's dictum for gospel, went greedily in at the long price, and before the flag fell, brought the horse to little over 4 to 1, to lose several hundreds and even a thousand or two for those who trusted in Ralph's version of the home-trial in the Old Vale. A few Oxonians, moreover, in the ring—with whom, as with most youngsters, every performer from their own country was safe to carry their money, and the Christchurch victory was still fresh in their minds—went for the Lord; and though that performance was too one-sided a one to be any sort of criterion of the real capabilities of Lord of the Valley, yet for once schoolboy instinct was right.

Altogether the sums invested on the Lord had been quoted at such long prices, considering that the field numbered only six starters—of whom two, moreover, belonging to a south-country nobleman, were generally understood to be “airing,” and were hardly touched upon at all by either backers or layers—that though the favourites still maintained their pride of place in the quotations, scarcely a bookmaker had escaped laying long shots against Ruby’s mount; and the horse stood at the last about the worst possible animal on their books, while vainly they tried to divine whether any definite commission had been sent in to back him, for the influx of support seemed to come indefinitely from all quarters.

“There goes Tomfool,” said Lord Sheffield to a companion at the rails, as they watched the canter; “goes well, considering his gruelling yesterday.”

“How did you think the favourite went?” asked his companion.

“Well enough, well enough; he’ll do,” said his lordship, who having something to do with the same stable as the Elephant and Mr. Knight, had been put on, when the cream of the market had been secured by the giant, to the tip that Tomfool was “squared,” and going to swim with Fisherman.

“What’s this in light blue and silver braid?” asked Major Cochrane, the companion, as Lord of the Valley swept up the course with a terrific stride, pulling double under Ruby, and literally revelling in the deep dirt.

“Can’t say,” said his lordship, consulting his card; “never heard of the horse before. Let’s try Ruff;” and



dived into the coat-pocket for *The Guide to the Turf*. "No mention of any such animal," he said, as he exhausted the index; "must be some fancy hunter, I suppose, whose owner thinks he can gallop over a race-course because he can jump over a hunting-country. There's always a horse or two coming out like that; they soon go back into their shells."

"He looks better class than a common hunter," said the major, as he watched the four-year-old careering up the course.

"Then I suppose he's a good one," said his lordship curtly.

"Do you think he'll be dangerous?" asked the major, who had got more money on Fisherman, as a last resource to pull back the losses of a bad week, than he could well find on the next Monday without a call in Clifford-street.

"He's a maiden—a dark one," said Lord Sheffield; "no man would be such an ass as to expose a good horse in such a small field as this, when he could handle him nicely for a Liverpool, if he was worth his salt, and stand to win at least forty thousand with him. No fear; if he's a bad one, he can't win, and if he's a good one, he's shunting."

"It's a gentleman-jockey up, anyhow," said the major, who had turned his opera-glass upon the telegraph-board, to read the names.

"That's no odds," said his lordship, who judged his neighbour's probity by his own.

"It all depends, of course; some of your paid gentlemen—such as James, and that lot—will of course stop a

horse as soon as look at you—they can't afford to quarrel with bread-and-butter ; but this is a young un up—a sort of baby cornet, I should say—not a bit of the 'leg' stamp ; he's not old enough to know much, by the look of him."

"Then he can't ride at his age, depend upon it. It's as good as giving away ten pounds at once to professionals as to put a child up ; even if he has got seat, he can't have hands, or any knowledge of pace. Don't fret yourself, man ; stand it out ; you can't make it pay to back two horses, with a favourite at 6 to 4."

"There's something up, anyhow," muttered the major, as he perceived Ralph—whom he recognised as the nominator and rider of Tomfool in the Hunt Cup on Wednesday, and with whom he might claim a sort of nodding acquaintance, from having sat at the same whist-table with him at Lord Valehampton's—walking out in the middle of the course unmolested by bobbies, who seemed to know that he was privileged, and going up to Ruby's rein as he walked Lord of the Valley back from his canter to the starting-point.

"There's a whole pot of money on you, my dear boy," said Romilly as he came up. "I thought we might as well save as many of our friends as possible from feeding the swine by backing Tomfool ; so I put Meldon, West, and all that lot, on to back you. Only keep your eyes in front of you, and don't stare round you ; the instant you're clear of one fence, fix your eye upon the place to choose in the next, and ride straight for it. Peter has told you about the pace, and where to take a half-pull in the heavy ground, hasn't he ?"

"All right," said Ruby demurely, and looking as innocent and collected as a baby waiting for its breakfast.

"And mind, if it is a strong-run race, as it is sure to be, and horses begin to get beat in the last mile and chance their fences, be careful how you ride in another man's wake. To begin with, your own horse is more likely to be careless, and try to run through a gap just broken by a leader, than if you put him at a new, clean bit of fence that he must rise at; but the worst is, if the horse in front of you comes down, you're safe to jump on top of him if you ride in his line; even if your own horse is fresh, and fencing clean and clear, it takes precious little to put him down on landing. I've seen a good race lost by a man that had fallen putting his head in the way of a horse that was coming after him; it spoilt the brute's landing, and brought him down a buster. You can't be too careful, especially when you're carrying a lot of money like this."

And with this admonition Ralph suffered Ruby to follow the rest of the field to the starter's flag.

"They're off!" said Lord Sheffield to Major Cochrane five minutes later, as they stood together on the Stewards' Stand.

The major had intercepted Ralph at the entrance of the enclosure, as the latter returned from admonishing Ruby, and interrogated him in an apparently indifferent way, as to what he thought of the chances of his own animal; never for an instant expecting a candid answer, but feeling at the same time that nothing could be lost by the asking.

And Ralph had simply said,

"O, how d'ye do? Didn't know you were here, or I would have told you sooner. My horse will run well, but that young brown that my cousin is riding is sure to beat him if he stands up; we put them together a fortnight ago. You had better have something on him; I think it is a good thing."

The major, opening his eyes at Ralph's candour, which bore the unmistakable stamp of sincerity, and anticipating the term "running well" as usually used of a horse that does not mean to win, said, as he turned to seek for the odds in the Babel behind him, "And you're going for this Lord of the Valley yourself?"

"I have backed him," said Ralph, in a tone of severe surprise, "if that is what you mean, and think he can hardly lose; my horse won't be ridden out uselessly for a place if the other has the race in hand in the cords; but of course he'll do his best up to that point, and is as likely as not to win if the other makes a mistake, which I do not expect. Of course I am not going to stop him for anyone."

"I see," said the major, puzzled at what he heard; "that explains the idea in the ring that Tomfool was to wait for Fisherman, and was in the same swim with him; they have got the wrong end of the stick."

"Wait for Fisherman!" said Ralph indignantly; "that aint in our line at all! The horse belongs really to the same cousin that owns the other one; he only ran in my name because I rode him the first day. They'll run on their merits, and the best will win, you may be sure of that; and I have told you which I think the best."

"That's the way to waste a Liverpool!" said the

major to himself as he darted into the crowd and secured sufficient at 9 to 2 and 4 to 1 to win him about eight hundred on Lord of the Valley, while Ralph, chafing at the insinuation, which but for the major's gray hairs would have brought a swinging box on the ears by way of reply, forced his way to the starting-post just in time to say to Peter, "Ride out for second place, and beat Fisherman anyhow;" which mandate Peter took passively, and pictured to himself the fury of the "Elephant" if Lord of the Valley should come to grief, and he be compelled to win upon Tomfool.

It cost Ralph sundry half-crowns among the sergeants of police before he could traverse the now empty course to the gateway of the stand enclosure. Before he reached it, the half-dozen starters had been dismissed, and came thundering by him down to the water-jump in front of the stand, which they took cleverly enough in their stride, Ruby sitting well back on the drop, and handling the young one in very creditable style, Tomfool making the running at a strong pace, and the other five so close that a tablecloth would have covered them. The major had mounted the stand, and told the result of his tip to Lord Sheffield just as the flag dropped; but the latter, who was already heavily on Fisherman, rather derided the idea that a mere casual acquaintance should so openly expose his cards to the major, professed his belief that the whole story of the Lord of the Valley's excellence was a mere blind to cloak the fact that Tomfool's head was not to be so loose as it might be, and valiantly avowed his intention to stand his money out.

Round the farther side of the course the horses went,

Tomfool still forcing the pace three lengths ahead of everything ; Fisherman lying back a little to bide his time, Lord of the Valley going alongside of Meteor, winner of the year's Liverpool steeplechase, an honest horse, trying his best, but paralysed, and unable to cope with the weight he had to carry ; and the two gentlemen who were out for an airing pulling double in the tracks of Fisherman, and looking fairly formidable to anyone who did not know the conditions under which they were running.

In much the same places they came round the corner and passed the stand the second time. Fisherman was going within himself, and on such good terms with the others that Lord Sheffield and the Elephant had every reason to be thoroughly satisfied with their prospects ; but the grand, raking stride of the Lord of the Valley as he came down the straight did not fail to draw the attention of many a connoisseur, and even his lordship began to grudge that he had not just saved his book upon him in consonance with the major's advice.

"By Jove, light-blue goes well !" exclaimed the major, as Tomfool led them all once more over the water, closely followed by Meteor, Lord of the Valley, and Fisherman, while behind them one of the lookers-on bungled the take-off and jumped short, and was down in an instant, his jockey spinning a dozen yards over his head, and the animal's hind-legs dragging helplessly in the water, as he made two or three convulsive efforts to raise himself on his forelegs, and then sunk piteously down again.

"There's a broken back !" said the major, as the crowd in an instant poured round the fallen—for the "run-in"

was in a different track from the water-jump, closer to the stand, and there was no longer necessity for keeping the other portion of the course clear.

"He wasn't spinning, so it doesn't do us any good," said his lordship, who was nervously watching Lord of the Valley's stride as the rest swung round the turn on the left.

"Just my luck!" embellishing his exclamation with a curse, said a tidy-looking country-gentleman stamp of individual behind them, the owner of the dying horse, and who had calculated on getting off a good seven pounds for the Liverpool by the losing performance of the day. "Never made a mistake before in his life, and now to come a mucker when he was out for exercise!" and he cursed inwardly more bitterly than before.

As they once more came opposite the stand on the further side of the course, and crossed a stubble-field, Peter, who was considering whether Ruby was ever coming, looked back, and caught the other's eye.

And Ruby, taking up his cue, improved Lord of the Valley's pace, and was alongside of Peter as they topped the next fence but one, Fisherman also closing up, Meteor struggling hard to hold his own, and the other remaining "spectator" judiciously tailing-off.

"Go on, master!" said Peter as they made the bend into the racecourse; and Lord of the Valley, with Tomfool at his girths, and Fisherman at his quarters on whip-hand, was at last making the running; and in this position they cleared the next two artificial obstacles and landed for the run-in.

"Light-blue wins!" yelled the populace, as they could see Ruby's Eton colours conspicuously in the van.

"The favourite don't win for fifty!" sang out a book-maker close in the rear of the Elephant, who couldn't at all understand matters.

"The favourite's beat!" was the next yell, as Platter, his jockey, raised his whip and was hard at him to keep him going.

"Outsider wins!" roared a fat grazier under the Elephant's elbow, as Ruby, in a fairly workmanlike manner, called slightly on Lord of the Valley, rather sooner than a professional would have done, but still running no risks of waiting too long, and was a length in front of everything as they came inside the cords.

Fisherman's jockey made his effort to close with the fleeting figure in front, but the horse barely headed Tomfool for a few strides, and then had shot his bolt. Ruby, sailing on with a clear lead, hands down, had it all his own way by three lengths as Lord of the Valley strode past the stand; and Peter, calling upon Tomfool in the last fifty yards, salved his conscience to the Elephant by seeing himself no more than an indifferent second, and discharged his loyalty to his master at the same time by beating Fisherman cleverly a length for second place, without any useless butchery; Meteor trotting in two hundred yards in the rear.

"A Liverpool thrown to the dogs by a pack of fools!" was his lordship's sole comment, as the judge's chair decided his fate.

"This is a pretty kettle of fish, Mr. Mell," said the Elephant to Peter, as he drew the latter aside on his return from weighing-in.

"Warn't I about right?" asked Peter; "I told you



ourn wouldn't win, nor he didn't; why didn't yourn come in front?"

"Why, you beat him after all in your places: if the outsider hadn't won you would. Call that honest dealing? I'm ashamed of you!"

"There now!" said Peter, "there's no pleasing you at no price. Your 'oss can't win, nor mine neither, and so I comes in afore you for second place, and gets no thanks for it! Why, it's sivin pound difference atween the two in the next handicap to have run in them places," he continued, improvising benefit as best he could, and determined to construe the *contretemps* to his own advantage.

"Well, I'm sorry we've dropped our coin; that Lord of the Valley's put us all in the hole," said the Elephant with melancholy. "Howsoever, as you say, I suppose it was a good turn of you to finish in front of ours when the game was up. I didn't think you were such a ready one—you were quick about it, egad! I won't forget you," and transferring a couple more sovereigns to Peter's palm, he winked at him, and returned to the enclosure.

"Scored all round," soliloquised Peter that evening over a pipe and hot grog in the back-parlour of his quarters at the Cock and Bottle. "We didn't make sich a bad thing over it, but it's a Liverpool clean chucked away. What a pot o' money we might ha' made, if master had been only half clever, to be sure! Nor he aint out of it yet, the 'oss aint; a growin' 'oss as 'ull come on sivin pound by March, and allow another sivin for the jockey. Master surely won't put that hinfant up for Aintree! And he warn't extended neither, nor pricked; won with nigh a stone and a half in hand. They mayn't

weight him out of it yet—they shouldn't if he wor mine," and Peter built golden castles of still getting into the Liverpool at eleven stone, at which weight he might be justified on public form in thinking the race nearly over.

"I must thank you for your very liberal and straight tip," said the major to Ralph, arm-in-arm with Ruby and Jemmy, half-an-hour later, in the enclosure. "You saved me entirely. I was plunging a mucker on Fisherman."

"I am glad you landed your money," said Ralph curtly, for he had not forgiven the insinuation that Tom-fool was squared.

"Allow me, Mr. Romilly," said the major, in obedience to a nudge from Lord Sheffield, "to introduce to you my friend Lord Sheffield—Lord Sheffield, Mr. Romilly;" and Ralph returned the peer's salute with a stiff and highly-patronising bow.

"I congratulate you upon your success, Sir," said the nobleman, in no way checked by Ralph's repellent attitude. "I suppose you would not like to sell that horse that won to-day? If so, name his price, and I have no doubt I can come to terms with you;" for his lordship had just made a calculation very similar to that which Peter arrived at later in the evening.

"Thank you," said Ralph shortly; "I am not a dealer, nor am I the owner; you had better address yourself to Mr. James Blake here, to whom Lord of the Valley belongs."

Lord Sheffield, nothing abashed by Ralph's rudeness, so long as business was in view, took off his hat to Jemmy.

"Do I understand that you wish to part with the horse, Sir?"

"Yes," said Jemmy, blandly, as he took his cue from Ralph's preceding conduct; "I have no objection, at a fair price."

"Eight hundred?" interrogated his lordship, starting an inside figure.

"Ten thousand," said Jemmy quietly yet promptly, without moving a muscle.

"I beg your pardon," said his lordship, not by any means sure of his own hearing.

"Ten thousand," replied Jemmy in the same stolid manner.

"Ten thousand! My good Sir, who on earth can buy a steeplechase horse for such a figure? Surely you do not mean that? I can't afford such figures; no one can—hey!"

"Nobody asked you, my lord," put in Ralph, who had been first frowning and finally chuckling at Jemmy's diplomacy and Lord Sheffield's discomfiture.

And while the latter opened his eyes at the unexceptionable personality of the rebuff, only excusable under the circumstances of Ralph's conversation with Major Cochrane, and from some news of the tactics of the Sussex stable that had come to Ralph's ears in the ring since the race, the latter turned to his cousin and said,—

"Never mind the last race; we must catch the next train, or we shall have no time for dinner before the 8.10. Good-evening, my lord; good-evening, Major Cochrane," and stiffly bowing to the pair, the trio pushed their way to the saddling-paddock.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### NEW-YEAR'S EVE.

**C**OMRADES of club and chambers, who had been intimate with Mr. James Blake in the metropolis not a twelvemonth ago, or had hobbled-and-nobbed with him on winter evenings in hunting-quarters, would have deemed his misogynistic tendencies strangely metamorphosed since last they had foregathered, had they been present to witness the doings of the Old Vale House on New-year's Eve.

The solemn dreariness of that overgrown and rambling mansion was by 9 P.M. swamped in a blaze of light from ground and first-floor windows, and still more gaudy illumination within.

There, within the entrance-hall—slipping ever and anon helplessly and piteously upon the polished floor, which Lady Mary had insisted on having undruggeted for the occasion—choked in a white tic and dog-collar, conscious that his gloves did not fit him, writhing yet striving to look pleasant on the infliction which the beetle

crusher of a recent arrival had just inflicted on his pet corn—chilled periodically to the marrow as every opening of the hall-door sent a blast of north-east wind eight degrees below freezing-point to wind its way between his shirt-studs, and search the weakest point to assail with lumbago—stood more or less for an hour the M.F.H. in purgatory, doing the honours and receiving a continual flood of guests. The ball, which Jemmy tacitly acknowledged to be owing to his position and dignity as Master of the Old Vale Hunt, would yet perhaps have never been brought to the scratch, had it not been for the presence of Lady Mary, Georgie, and Ruby.

Jemmy had committed himself to a general promise of some such entertainment so long ago as the occasion of Lady Mary's and Georgie's first visit to superintend the domestic economy of Jemmy's lawn-meet entertainment, but the date had been definitely fixed, and Jemmy shuddered visibly at the onus when Christmas drew near, and wanted to put it off till Easter, as a wind-up, as he expressed it, to his duties of the season.

But the ladies would not hear of the attempt at shirking and procrastination, and Jemmy was judiciously badgered till he was fairly brought to book, and compelled to issue cards of invitation for the day in question a clear fortnight in advance. So he submitted to his fate; engaged, as a matter of course, his aunt and cousin to come over and take the reins in hand, and having spent a cosy Christmas at the Maule, brought them both back with him five days in advance, to give them clear space to make arrangements, and consoled himself—as he witnessed the house turned topsy-turvy, the drawing-room

dismantled of furniture and beeswaxed under foot to such an extent that the master, on entering to idly reconnoitre, speedily found his view most readily taken in a sitting posture; and on the last day even his own pet den profaned as a tea-room and sanctuary for flirtation—that at least he was obliging Georgie's especial request, giving her amusement, and proving the adage that one person's pleasure could well be another person's poison.

Ruby, too, had been kicking his heels in the Old Vale for the last few days, grumbling at the frost, hourly visiting the Lady and feeling her legs, studying outside edge on the lake with Ralph, or stalking wild-duck in the gloaming. The only finger which he had stirred from first to last to aid the arrangements of the household had been employed on the afternoon of New-year's Eve itself in surreptitiously suspending a colossal mistletoe over the doorway, just inside Jemmy's sanctuary, for the better performance of his views in reference to sundry of the coming guests.

And Georgie herself, who at first had been *ipso facto* pleased at the contest with Jemmy's indolence and dread of gaiety, and had subsequently thrown herself heart and soul into the labours of the week, making herself a very useful second string to Lady Mary, seemed now, to a careful observer, almost *ennuyée* and melancholy that she had so completely gained her point and secured her own way.

Probably nothing went further to damp her ardour and make her half regret the pertinacity with which she had overridden Jemmy's pleas for procrastination, than a letter which she had the morning before received from

Blanchè Marshall, telling her what Jemmy knew days before, though he had stifled his terror, and done his best to crush and drive from his mind the horror of anticipation of the coming penance, viz. that Clara Vane would be staying the old year out with them at Ashton-grove, and that Sir John intended to take the liberty of bringing her with the rest of his houseful.

But if Jemmy was hardened with the toils and *désagréments* of office, and Georgie piqued at the presence of her quondam schoolfellow, Algernon Paget and Clara Vane were each *par excellence* in their element, and thoroughly satisfied with their surroundings. Here was ample scope for each to recover lost ground, recompense disappointment, and make hay while the sun shone. Nor did Jack Marshall consider himself at all out of it, as he honoured himself with an extra evening shave at his toilet that evening, spoilt the fronts of two clean shirts, and discarded innumerable white ties, ere he deemed himself, on contemplation in the glass, satisfactorily equipped for action. They might say what they liked, and bully about that confounded stirrup-iron; but he meant to make running for himself that day over a comparatively easy country that suited his style and nerves to a *t*. After all there was nothing like carrying the war straight into the enemy's country.

And no doubt there were many other aspirants who landed with similar intent for parallel cases at the portico of the Old Vale House that New-year's Eve; but to crowd the stage with too many characters, other than mere mutes, can only cripple the action of the leaders of the piece, and, content with symbolical representation under

the stars of the drama, the sayings and doings of the *polloi* must be left to themselves or general conjecture.

And as the throng grew fuller and more animated, the deputation from Coote and Tinney found that it was time to commence their part of the performance, and after judicious tuning, scraping and preluding, launched boldly into the Guards waltz, and the ball at once was fairly set rolling.

Jemmy was still helplessly tethered at his duties in the entrance-hall, but Paget was on the alert, and, this time energetically anticipating Jack Marshall, who had been lying in wait for the last ten minutes to seize his opportunity, swaggered boldly up to Georgie, and pleaded for the opening dance.

So far as securing her for a partner he was successful, but for the two there was but little dancing, in this first essay, while Georgie's self-imposed duties led her peregrinating the room to set other couples going and facilitate introductions for those who were at a loss for partners. Paget patiently put up with the procrastination, leading her, at her beck and call, in and out of the throng, as she espied one gentleman and another lady inanely playing the wallflower instead of embarking boldly at once into the duties of the evening.

It was only during the last few bars that they succeeded in getting a couple of turns round the room ; and of course the partial failure of the engagement, and the dutiful squiring of Master Algernon, entitled him to request the honour of another galop lower down the card, and a set of Lancers were booked in addition before he relinquished his charge to Jack Marshall, who had paci-



fied himself with an engagement for the following quadrille.

And presently Jemmy, chafing under delays and a continuous stream of arrivals hitherto, found space to look in at the door, and was none the more gratified with himself and Georgie, to see who was Jack Marshall's partner, as the latter threaded the mazes of ladies'-chain in a high state of exultation.

But despite his misery and antipathy to the whole routine of gaiety, Jemmy had, with fellow-feeling for others engendered by his own predilections and reminiscences, remembered to provide what would have slipped the foresight of Lady Mary and Georgie. The billiard-room was nicely warmed and lighted up, two choice boxes of havannahs placed therein for the benefit of those whose love-dreams ended in smoke, and a couple of neat card-tables and appurtenances were laid for the benefit of chaperones and elderly bachelors in the breakfast-room.

Jemmy knew too well where his own retreat would be under ordinary circumstances, but for the stern call of the duties of his own household, and the latent jealous feeling of keeping his eye upon Georgie and her partners; and charitably measuring his neighbour by himself, he provided accordingly, and looked oft with longing eyes at Sir John, Ralph, Lady Marshall, and a few others, who were soon enjoying themselves free from cares and anxieties of flirtation and giddiness of circumgyration, in social sets of six, one pair cutting out as spectators after each brace of rubbers.

But such Elysium was not to be Jemmy's lot that

night, and by ten o'clock he had settled himself against the wall near the doorway, running multitudinous hair-breadth escapes to the corns, but manfully doing his duty of introduction whenever occasion demanded, and cautiously waiting to waylay Georgie, when her second dance with Paget should come to a close, as she should pass him on her way with the rest of the heated dancers to seek cooler air in the passages and lobby outside, and to secure, if possible, one or two decent sets of Lancers with her for himself.

The gallop came to an end, though to Jemmy, in his impatient jealousy, it had seemed almost interminable. As the couple came within range of him, Jemmy made a signal to Georgie to heave-to, and with his old paternal air held out his hand for her card and explained his wants.

But Miss Warren, as perhaps the leading belle of the room, and certainly the most elegant and piquante one, had, of course, been long ago in high demand, more than one disappointed swain had already been informed that her programme was irrevocably filled, though Georgie had, by judicious diplomacy, reserved a couple of round dances for her host and cousin, should he apply for them.

They were now at his service; but Jemmy wanted Lancers, and Lancers were not to be had; every other available dance but the two in question had been snapped up long ago, and there was no help for it. Jemmy grumblingly remarked that she knew that he did not dance anything but square dances, and that she ought to have kept one for him; she naïvely reminded him that the very last time when they had danced together, in the

London season, he had unlearned the error of his ways, and performed a galop most creditably; judging his preference by that she had accordingly kept one for him.

But Jemmy remembered how his supper had been irrevocably ruined by the gyration on that occasion, and though at another time he would not have grudged the sacrifice of his stomach for Georgie's sake, yet at this moment his pique was in no way softened to perceive the cognomen of Jack Marshall inscribed already twice on the tablet before him. Of Paget he seemed to have no suspicion, nor did he appear to notice his name staring him thrice in the face.

So, grumbling that it couldn't be helped, that he had made himself seedy once before by round dances, and was too old for any more of them, he drew back with a frown to allow her and her partner to make their exit; nor did he raise his eyes to notice Georgie's expression, or observe a few seconds later how very near she was to something like choking, as she slowly cleared her voice to give a monosyllabic reply to some commonplace remark of her *empresé* partner.

Nor was Jemmy a bit consoled, but rather sorer than ever with "just his luck" when, five minutes later, while the fiddles were tuning-up for a set of medley Lancers, and double sets were being eagerly planned by enthusiasts fond of a scrimmage, Lady Mary came to him and said—

"Blanche Marshall and Major Crawley want a *vis-à-vis* to make up a double set, do get a partner and go to them; you haven't danced yet that I have seen. There's Clara Vane close to you, as showy a partner as you can

want, and no doubt competent to pilot you through any amount of intricacies."

And Jemmy passively obeyed, and took his place like a sheep led to the slaughter. Then, at that instant, Georgie—entering with Jack Marshall, who had with difficulty at last extracted her from Paget, and was now rushing about for a *vis-à-vis*—looked up and saw him and Clara Vane, the latter of course smiling and voluble as ever.

"Never mind a *vis-à-vis* for me, Mr. Marshall," said his partner, "unless you particularly wish it; I feel a little tired; would you mind letting me sit down instead? You have plenty of time, I hope, to find a better partner."

And Jack Marshall felt that patient virtue had won its own reward, as he acceded to the proposal to sit down, denied the possibility of searching for a better partner, and drew Georgie off to the tea-room for a ten minutes' Elysium of commonplace gossip. But Jemmy's wandering eye remarked them as they relinquished the dance and made their exit, and bitterly he lamented that his threat about calomel had not been carried long ago into effect—it must be postponed now; it would be dangerous, not to say impossible, to attempt such tactics in public, and at risk to the rest of the company at his own supper-table.

Nor were his trials over. Clara Vane also was prodigiously fatigued after the meanderings of double ladies' chain, and persuaded Jemmy to escort her to a seat in the study, and purvey her an ice; and there Jemmy had to seat himself alongside of her—to the discomfiture of

Jack Marshall, who wished to improve the opportunities of his *tête-à-tête*,—and exposed to the searching eye of Georgie, who watched them too intently to pay the least attention to Jack's conversation, so that a tender yet commonplace query as to whether Miss Warren was fond of flowers, which Jack Marshall had carefully framed in hopes that it would afford him excuse to offer the exotic from his buttonhole, fell thrice in utter absence of mind to the ground ere he could at last attract her attention, only to receive a dreamy reply that she didn't know, didn't care.

Gladly would she have stayed on the watch for another hour had she been allowed, but Major Crawley came up to claim her for the next dance, and fearing to offend him, she resigned herself and went, wondering bitterly what on earth Jemmy could find to talk to that Clara about.

Poor Jemmy! he hadn't much chance of talking; his work was fully cut out for him by simple listening.

The strawberry-ice had nicely lubricated Miss Vane's throat, and she talked a good nineteen to the dozen. Nor was there any great prospect of escape; she too was "tired," and pleaded respite from Ruby and another youngster, who came up successively to claim her for the next two dances; and Jemmy's card was too complete a blank for him to have the face to produce it and plead other engagements.

So positions were *in statu quo* when, at the expiration of a third dance, Georgie, this time with Ruby, who made judicious use of the mistletoe in the room, found her way back to the study.

"You're a nice pair of idlers!" said the young gentleman as he came in; "I should hope you were rested by now! Why don't you cut in and dance? Come and be my *vis-à-vis* in this next quadrille, Jemmy; there's lots of introductions wanted in the next room; I don't know half the people."

And Ruby, who meant to draw Jemmy away from Miss Vane, in revenge for her having bilked him of his dance previously, only succeeded in playing into her hands; for Jemmy, at first joyfully rising at the prospect of release, in another instant consulted his card, foolishly straight under Clara's nose, and as he could discover no name or special mark that could plead the least excuse for saluting another partner, he had nothing to do but turn round and solicit the further pleasure of Miss Vane's hand for the dance, and in a few minutes found himself *vis-à-vis* with Ruby and Georgie, who were booked to perform the two consecutive dances together.

It was with a feeling of intense relief at the close of the dance that Jemmy found a loophole conscientiously and truthfully to say to Miss Vane, "I will introduce you to Captain Meldon of the Carbineers, if you will let me bring him up, and then I think I must run away to see if supper is almost ready."

So he slipped off in search of the captain, who had vacancies on his card, and was by no means averse to a showy and high-stepping partner; and then Mr. Blake made an exit to reconnoitre the supper-room, and finding all things ready, and the witching hour close falling due, saved himself from further persecution by fulfilling the etiquette of handing off Lady Kenilworth to the dining-

room, at the close of the next dance ; made himself the pink of pleasantry, as he did his *devoir* at the head of the table ; complimented her ladyship upon the brilliant looks of her *débutante* daughter Evelyn ; half made up his mind to go the length, later in the evening, of trying his hand at a square dance with that damsel ; and felt relieved as if a new era had dawned upon him as the clock struck midnight and enabled him to pledge her ladyship in a bumper to the new year.





## CHAPTER XXII.

### CARRYING ON.

**T**HE supper was perhaps the most enjoyable, or rather the least wearisome, performance of the whole evening for Mr. Blake. To begin with, it had been managed and arranged by Lady Mary, and not himself, so that he had no onus or responsibility of it upon his shoulders beyond the natural censure that must be passed upon a host should anything go culpably wrong. But he had such implicit trust in his aunt's tact and powers of management, that he felt completely at ease on that score as he sat at the head of his board and glanced down side-tables and centre-pieces at some hundred and fifty guests making the most of the good things of this life.

Attendants were plentiful ; there was no need for a famished guest to wait half-an-hour for a clean plate or a dish of anything that tempted his appetite. The soup was hot—no bad adjunct on a wintry night ; other comestibles of all sorts and varieties well served up ; and his bitterest enemy had never yet been able to accuse Mr.



Blake of giving bad wine. A good brand of "Perrier Jouet" had been especially imported for the occasion, so as to give no excuse for injuring digestions by mixing different growths of champagne as bottles circulated, which might have been the case had Mr. Blake's ordinary cellarage of "sweet" and "dry" been drawn upon; and to judge by the fusillade of corks, it found ample favour all round; and there were one or two brews of "mull" for those who preferred hot stopping or were emulous to mix their liquors.

Before Mr. Blake glittered a large statuette of frosted silver—the Croydon Cup—lately won by Ruby and Lord of the Valley; and as centre-piece in the middle of the room stood the only item which Jemmy had insisted upon or in any way interfered with when he expressed his intention of doing what he could to "give pleasure to the young people," to wit, a Christmas-tree of infinite ramifications, and towering to the ceiling.

But apart from the intense feeling of relief at his respite from Clara Vane and the satisfaction engendered at seeing matters passing off swimmingly and his guests enjoying themselves, Mr. Blake himself, though no real gourmand, liked his supper, as in fact he did every meal that came to hand during the day. Jemmy's maxim was, that if a thing was worth doing at all, it was worth doing well, and on that principle he never if possible allowed a meal to pass without doing it all the justice in his power.

It was with a view to his own comfort, which he could scarcely have secured without making similar provision for his company, that he had objected to a stand-up meal, come and go, for one half to feed while the others kept

the pot boiling in the ball-room turn about. This was not at all in Jemmy's line. Such an arrangement might have created calls upon him to superintend and do honours for hours, and he had not then calculated how acceptable such labours might be as a refuge from the mercies of Clara Vane. Jemmy's idea of comfort was to sit comfortably down at all hazards, and to be snugly waited on—no standing up, fishing for oneself, treading on toes and tearing of flounces.

So he had laid his head together with the Ashton carpenter and upholsterer, and planned tables and forms in all directions and ramifications, and had the satisfaction of seeing his *salle-à-manger* snugly and brilliantly filled, everyone at his ease, and no wretched bachelor outsiders shivering and starving in the cold till retirements should afford space for them.

And so with nothing to distract his mind—but rather undergoing, after his release from Clara Vane, a reaction similar to that which made Ixion and Sisyphus, when lulled to rest by the magic of Orpheus' flute, deem for the instant that no cushion or couch of the hara or seraglio had ever equalled the luxury of the then stable stone and stationary wheel; that made, at the same time, Tantalus enjoy his draught of water better than the most delicate bouquet of moselle—Jemmy Blake applied himself to his supper with first-rate appetite, for he had dined at 6.30 to enable the room to be cleared in time for operations.

Nor did Lady Kenilworth hamper him too much by commonplace conversations; like Jemmy, she had dined pretty early, and had also undergone a long drive in bracing frosty air, and, in common with most chaperons, had

a better appetite and less scruple to veil the same than the young ladies of the period, whose artificial tactics would lead them to profess ethereal tastes that could not brook the indignity of anything coarse or substantial, even when gnawing nature was tempting them to fall tooth and nail upon the first *pièce de résistance* in front of them.

But there was an end to all things; and when in time Jemmy and Lady Kenilworth had done ample justice to the resources of Lady Mary's housekeeping, and offered full libation to the shade of Perrier Jouet, the hour drew near when they must leave the table which had lost with the evanescence or rather satisfaction of appetite so much of its charms; though to Jemmy it would have been welcome all night, at all hazards, had it been feasible, simply as a haven from persecution.

So her ladyship drew on her gloves, which she had bravely and in a business-like way discarded when she went into action, and Jemmy handed to her for the first draw the lottery-basket of prizes from his Christmas-tree.

In the latter part of the arrangement, viz. the sorting and numbering of tickets, Ralph had had a hand; and this perhaps accounted for the preposterous size of the tickets, at least as large as an ordinary visiting-card.

But Ralph had a design in view when he took the basket from Jemmy's hands and went round the room with it, so hitting off his distributions and peregrinations that he came quite at the last to the corner where Jack Marshall was doing his best to make himself agreeable to Georgie, and gathering the remnants of the tickets in his fingers, spread them fan-like in front of the gentle-

man, shuffling them and crossing them rapidly with that sleight of hand that those who know how to "force a card" can so readily practise. And Jack, off his guard, only grudging the interruption in his converse with Miss Warren, drew of course the ticket which was played into his hand, while Ralph passed on to complete his distribution.

Then came the hunt for prizes, which in justice to Jemmy Blake were all more or less worth having, though in many cases so incongruously distributed: one young lady had drawn a cigar-case; another a razor; Miss Laura Maddox, who stood nearer six foot than anything else, and had a substantial "eight-and-a-quarter" fist, got a pair of lavenders at "sixes;" Major Crawley, a confirmed bachelor, found his due in a neatly-worked baby's cap; and the Rev. Henry Craven, who similarly had been for a decade proof in his vicarage to the onslaught of "caps" that had been set at him by parishioners and neighbours in Ashton, was rewarded with a chaste coral-and-bells.

But, again, there were some draws which were perhaps more appropriate, and raised merriment, stifled or free according to the individuals—such as when Major White, the veriest screw in the county, whose subscription to the hounds could be obtained with less ease than blood from a stone, and whose nominal contributions to schools and parish charities had always in the long-run to be made up by the vicar himself—obtained a neat missionary cash-box, adorned externally with frescoes of negroes, paying in the most primitive attire adoration to grinning idols, and on the lid a sinister-looking black scoundrel appeal.

ing to the sympathies of Englishmen with the interrogative formula, "Am I not a man and a brother?" "God forbid!" ejaculated the major, with pious horror, in reply, as he read the inscription, and speedily concealed his prize, dreading lest it should be suggested that he should set a bright example by dropping coin into it.

And his better-half also caused amusement by drawing a jockey's cap, elegantly worked by Georgie. Lady Kenilworth got a smoking-cap; but this, she remarked, would do nicely for his lordship, and prevent him from showing his bald head too much in the house, and so reminding her how fast time had flown.

Ruby drew a chignon, and of course did not at once hear the end of that. But the climax of chaff was reached when Jack Marshall searched on the tree, now nearly stripped, for his own prize, and was helped to the neatest little charm in the world, a tiny stirrup mounted on a chaste little Russia-leather strap and silver buckle. The story of the lost stirrup on the celebrated Ashton-spinnies day had already got wind more than Marshall junior cared for, and the roar of laughter that greeted the exhibition of his prize, and the queries from others as to the meaning and applicability of the joke, caused few who were curious to be ignorant of the story by the time that they left the room.

Ralph's malice must have been intensely gratified as he looked over the table at Jack's sheepish glances and scarlet face. Jack cursed his luck (?) for having drawn just the only prize out of one hundred and fifty that could have made him a public laughing-stock, and his equanimity was in no way improved to observe that even

Georgie's good-nature could not restrain her from smiling in concert with the rest, though she presently lamely apologised for having done so, and explained that what amused her was rather the general merriment of the room than its application to Mr. Marshall himself, hoped that their chaff had not annoyed him, and owned that it was a shame to tease in such a way.

The real truth probably was that Georgie had presently understood what had been Ralph's tactics when he so sedulously shuffled his tickets at the last, and was more amused at the scheme and success of her cousin's plot than at the plot itself.

But Jack was instantly reassured and comforted by her explanation, and consoled himself that even if the general company chose to make game of him, there was at least one in the room who had sense enough to appreciate him.

And now the interlude was over, and a general exodus made for the ball-room, which had been a blank for over three-quarters of an hour. Those who had drawn cumbersome goods from the tree sought to deposit their property in the cloak-room. Sir John, Ralph, the Rev. H. Craven, and others such as these, went to recommence operations at the card-tables. Jemmy looked longingly at the billiard-room door, and would have given a good deal to sneak quietly in there and ruminate over a havannah; the dancing part of the population, like giants refreshed, were warming to their work, and spinning like teetotums; and Coote and Tinney's men were fiddling more viciously than before under the recent genial influences of a cold round of spiced beef and hot sausages

in the housekeeper's room, backed up by a welcome brew of hot stopping to warm their heart strings, and thence to electrify the fiddle-strings.

Jemmy helplessly meandering about the rooms, worming his way dexterously between toes and trains, found himself once more let in for a confabulation with Miss Vane, who was nominally resting in the study from the effects of a forty-mile-an-hour gallop with Major Crawley, but virtually had watched Jemmy sauntering cautiously in there, looking about him to see if the coast was clear as he peered in at the doorway, and then gathering courage to rest his tired limbs upon an empty settee; and Miss Vane, alive to the opportunity, dragged her partner in the traces of the prey, and secured a seat at right-angles to the horror-struck M.F.H.

And manfully she held her ground, or rather her seat, when in another minute the major had to leave her and make up his set with a fresh partner for some impending Lancers. There was no help for it; Jemmy was let in again, and in durance he had to abide—for of course Miss Vane was "too tired" to respond to the claims of the partner to whom the Lancers were booked—till the music stopped, and fresh couples thronged into the room.

Among them came Georgie and Ruby; the former had noticed Clara's absence from the ball-room during the last set, and nature prompted her to unearth her, or at least see that no mischief was brewing. And when in a few seconds she passed and looked at the master and his captor, secured on the identical seat on which they had sat out three consecutive dances before supper, a strange sort of feeling seemed to run through her, and Jemmy, as

he looked up, rose instantly, at once oblivious of Clara Vane and an interrogatory which she was pausing for him to reply to, and said in an undertone of most paternal tenderness—"You're as pale as a ghost, child. I'm afraid you have done too much to-day before the evening began; don't attempt to stay it out—you had much better go to bed."

But Georgie shook her head, and still looked ghastly.

"No one will notice your absence," continued Jemmy. "It is not worth while making yourself ill for the sake of a few more dances. I declare I think you're going to faint, child," he said, as he looked more closely into her face.

But Georgie, though in an unwonted and excited frame of mind, had no intention of fainting; a few seconds ago she had half made up her mind to slip off to her room, and hide herself and her feelings in solitude; but Jemmy's speech of course decided her the other way.

"He wants me out of the way; but I—I'll stay to the last, to see what happens," thought she. "What a horrid girl that Clara is! How could I ever have made a friend of her?"

So Georgie stood her ground, and declared herself fresh and well, with no intention of going to bed before the time, and then moving on with Ruby, left Jemmy once more at the mercy of Miss Vane. But the master suddenly improvised a deliverance, when, on consulting his card, he discovered the name of Lady Evelyn Kensil, whom he had gone to the length of engaging for a set of later quadrilles. It was easy not to know the exact dance which he had booked, and pleading engagement, he



sought out the *débutante* in the next room, salved his conscience by asking what he knew well enough before, then retreated to the billiard-room, and took care not to show his nose out of it till he heard the band strike up the prelude to "Agnes Sorrel."

And Jemmy kept his best wits about him for the remainder of the evening, and, his supper now safely concluded and fairly digested, he went in boldly for the remaining five dances that were on the card, round and square indiscriminately, lest, idle and unprotected, he should again be assailed by Miss Vane.

Georgie, espying him spinning round the room with Blanche Marshall after his distinct disinclination to do the same with her earlier in the evening, looked paler than ever, and thought of him and Clara Vane. "She must have accepted him, or he could not be in such high spirits;" and she felt more determined than ever to see the drama of the evening played to the last. Jemmy soon came to her, and said that he felt equal now to a round dance if she had one for him.

And she replied frigidly that he should have come sooner; that those which she had kept for him had gone long ago. She watched to see him, as she of course expected, dancing presently with Clara Vane; but as the dances passed on, Jemmy still steered clear of the lady in question.

Georgie explained to herself, "They won't rouse suspicion by dancing too often just yet. I wonder when it will be known?"

At the last dance but one, Lady Marshall collected her brood and made her adieux to Jemmy in the ball-

room ; but Georgie managed to be straying with Major Crawley in the hall in time to see the Ashton-Grove party under weigh. She could not make out why Jemmy was not there, but Jack Marshall was doubly pleased at the inclination which Miss Warren ("Georgie" he was tempted to call her as he wished her good-night ; but Georgie's thoughts were in the next room, and she did not notice the liberty of speech) seemed to display to see the last of him. He felt surer than ever that he had made his impression.

Soon after the Ashton-Grove party had rolled off, Jemmy led out Lady Evelyn Kensil, with whom he had taken sanctuary for the last dance, to seek her wraps in the cloak-room, and join her mother, who was waiting for her in the hall.

So soon as he had seen the mother and daughter off, "Where were you five minutes ago?" said Ruby, who had been standing with Ralph, gossiping with parting guests ; "Sir John wanted to see you just as he was starting ; but you were not to be seen."

"Only to pay you the long odds on that rubber in which you backed us," said Ralph in explanation ; "but why did you not come and see them off?"

"So they're gone, then," was all Jemmy replied, with an unmistakable sigh of relief. "I was better engaged dancing with Evelyn Kensil. I dare say they could wrap up without me ; and Sir John's coin will keep."

"I thought you would have helped Clara Vane to find her cloak ; she was ten minutes finding it, and declared that you knew where it was, and had put it away for her somewhere," said Ruby maliciously.

"What a——mistake!" said Jemmy, modulating his voice and verbiage in the last word. "I never touched her cloak in my life; I'm sure she ought to be able to take care of herself by now." And he turned to Georgie, "You don't look so pale as you did, child; but you've had a long day of it; go to bed—there is no more dancing now."

And Georgie obeyed, cogitating.

"I can't make it out; I don't think he has proposed, after all—or else she has refused him. I wonder!" and she reached her bed-room door, whither the public may not follow.





## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE SPRING CAMPAIGN.

**I**T was during the first week in the following February that Mr. Blake, after breakfast on a non-hunting morning, was studying his *Times* and *Standard*, which reached him by afternoon delivery of the day of publication, but over which he as often as not contrived to sleep after dinner before he had half digested their contents.

The class-lists at the close of the winter term had brought out Ralph a creditable "double second," "which should have been firsts," quoth his tutor regretfully, "if he hadn't tried to make up three years' idleness in six months' reading."

Jack Marshall had secured a fourth, to his own disgust and the surprise of all the tutors except one, who argued that his eighteen months' reading was the very thing which had muddled him.

Mr. Blake was now making up for lost time, and deeply immersed in the report of a strenuous speech of the Con-

servative leader in the Lower House, in support of a motion of vote of censure upon the then standing Liberal government, in consequence of certain bungling peace-at-any-price diplomacy in Armenia.

Mr. Blake was in his den; his body secured in one arm-chair, his feet hanging over the back of another; the inevitable after-breakfast havannah between his lips. He dutifully finished the speech in question and then took the leading article upon it, before he turned to the *Sportsman*, which had also come in, and contained the weights of the Birmingham and Westbury steeplechases, for which Tomfool and Lord of the Valley had been duly entered, as well as for the Liverpool.

The Liverpool handicapper had been on the whole literally just to Lord of the Valley's public form by honouring him with eleven stone ten; but the measure of justice to the animal himself was considerably counter-balanced by the fact that either carelessness or favouritism had let in certain well-known first-class animals, who had been "performing" all over the country with a view to this race, at preposterously low weights, which must inevitably place *hors de combat* any horse who had honestly done his best, and been weighted accordingly.

This discrepancy had nearly decided Mr. Blake not to run either of his horses at Aintree, and the only argument that kept him at all in a state of indecision on the subject was, that though Tomfool had been measured at Croydon almost to an ounce, Lord of the Valley had no more done his "best" than the veriest "roper" that ran, for the simple reason that there had been no occasion to ask him what he really could do, so long as his "second

best" had been good enough for all intents and purposes. If, therefore, he was weighted according to what he had publicly displayed, there was still hope that he might have something in hand beyond what the handicapper credited.

The sporting-prophets of the papers were of course already taking up their parables, and killing winter months with dreary columns of "analysis," in which every horse was allowed in turn to be likely as not to win, under certain conditions and reservations.

Although none of them, from first to last, had a *penchant* for Lord of the Valley, considering him crushed out of the race by the weight in comparison to his years, the public, who are on the whole often better judges than the professional tipsters, had one and all made an idol of the Croydon-Cup hero, from the instant that the weights appeared ; for the populace are prone to judge by the individual merits of a horse, rather than his relative capabilities according to weights ; and it is in these instances where they make their lucky hits ; for the theoretical science of handicapping is often confounded by the practical impossibility to bring really good and really bad horses together at any weights ; and so it often is that a welter-weighted animal defies theory by walking in, for the simple reason that he is in a class superior to anything else in the race.

No one knows what a Derby winner who took to jumping might not accomplish over a country, compared to other horses ; nor will the question ever be sifted, unless some enthusiast be willing to pay two or three thousand for the privilege of asking the question ; for the

reason that horses of that stamp are too valuable to be so risked. It is only cast-off flat-racers that "come to the country," and even they can make any first-class hunter look intensely foolish.

Lord of the Valley had wasted his sweetness on the air of the Yorkshire downs, so far as flat-racing had been concerned. His suspected wind prevented him as a yearling from being considered worth having, and it was only when he had filled out in growth, but at the same time lost that education of galloping in early youth and knack of quickness at starting which is essential for the flat, that his suspected "roaring" was proved to be no more than mere "high blowing."

Thus it was that Jemmy had come unawares to have in his hands a cross-country horse of a stamp above the average.

It was also because the public had already rushed to back the horse, and brought him to the head of the poll ever so long in advance, that Mr. James Blake was hesitating not to give them a run for their money, or rather not to cripple the horse's chance by incurring penalties for him by winning any intermediate race meantime ; for it would, of course, be simple enough to give the horse a run in some shape or other if wanted, even if he had to carry a house on his back.

But Mr. Blake—as has been seen already—did not care to bet, or to race for lucre ; he liked the pure sport of the thing, and was thus the last man to quibble about "forestalments" in the market, or "prior claims." The only objection he had to running his favourite in the Liverpool was his grudge to see him beaten or his scutcheon

in any way defaced by defeat, which seemed so highly probable under his severe impost.

It was getting on for 11 A.M., and Mr. Blake had not yet analysed and compared the weights of the new sheet of the *Calendar* to his heart's content, when his valet entered with a telegram.

"What's up?" quoth Mr. Blake to himself as he broke the seal and unfolded the tissue; "five bob to pay, anyhow, for the intelligence," he continued, as he calculated the distance from Ashton station.

"*From* ROMILLY, *Langham Hotel,*

"*to*

"JAMES BLAKE, *Old Vale House, Ashton.*

"Government beaten last night on Armenian question; sure to dissolve: steal a start in canvass."

"Hey!" said Mr. Blake, as he digested the contents. "Just the thing; no harm in stealing a march." And he ordered a hack at once to take him to Ashton-Grove.

Sir John, of course, was as cordial and enthusiastic as was his wont when Jemmy announced the probability of an immediate dissolution, and his own aspiration to contest the eastern division of the county with the present Liberal representative.

The dogcart took the two on to Ashton before lunch-time, and in the office of old Bowen, Sir John's agent and solicitor, an address was concocted and sent to be put in type on "spec.," ready for issue at any moment.

It was another eight-and-forty hours before the intention



of the cabinet became finally known, and the dissolution announced. Again the news was telegraphed on a non-hunting day, and Mr. Blake spent an energetic afternoon in canvassing the enlightened electors of two or three neighbouring parishes of the Old Vale ; while his address was speedily placarded in "true blue" colours on every available deadwall and hoarding within range of Ashton.

One great aid which Jemmy could specially count upon was the interest and influence of Sir John Marshall ; not that the latter would for one instant have put on pressure or in any way have coerced tenants to his own way of thinking, but the electors as a rule ran very much in grooves, and if Sir John and a few staunch supporters once set an example, the rest of Ashton and its suburbs were pretty sure to follow, like sheep to the bell-wether in the gap.

A subscription for expenses was at once opened at the Ashton bank. Sir John headed the poll with 500/. But about a few days after the issue of Jemmy's proclamation, and just as the M.F.H. had returned radiant and muddy from a most satisfactory combination of business with pleasure—a rattling gallop after a morning fox, and a successful gossip with four or five dubious householders on his track home—Sir John landed from his phaeton at the Old Vale door, his plump, ruddy face looking longer than Jemmy could ever have imagined possible.

And so soon as Jemmy had welcomed him, and seated him in a chair, dreading every instant a seizure of apoplexy, wondering whether either of the Miss Marshalls had eloped, or the Bank suspended payment, Sir John

cleared his throat, hurled his respirator to the ground, stamped his capacious foot, thumped his knee with the fist, and found breath to say,

“By Jove, Sir, here’s a pretty go !, aint it ?”

“What is it, Sir John ?” asked the master nervously, cogitating whether in any way he could have given offence to the banker and his family.

“Matter, hey ! my son Jack, hey ! Haven’t you heard yet ?”

“No,” said Jemmy, who could hardly realise that the stirrup-leather grievance had suddenly been brought to light.

“God bless us ! he wants to oppose you, man !”

“Does he ?” said Jemmy mechanically ; his thoughts were at that moment running on Georgie before all other matters. “I don’t think he’ll succeed, do you, Sir John ?”

“Egad ! I hope not ; but it’s horrid awkward for me, aint it ? Whoever thought my lad was such a fool ? I knew he was a bit of an ass ; but come, this is too much of a good thing !”

“He wants to stand against me, does he, for the county ? is that it ?” asked Jemmy, as he saw things more in their proper light.

“Of course he does ; and aint it a kettle of fish to put on my hands ? What do you say, Mr. Blake ?” continued Sir John, when Jemmy made no immediate reply.

“I shall be very happy to withdraw in his favour,” said Jemmy mendaciously ; the affair, though he seemed to have no choice in the matter, stung the depths of his inmost soul.

"I shall be ashamed of you if you do, Sir!" said Sir John pompously, drawing himself up with a Brutus air.

"But is it not a pity for the Tories to cut each other's throats by antagonism when there's a Whig in opposition?"

"Tory!" roared Sir John. "No such luck!"

"I'm not against *all* improvement," said Jemmy apologetically; "but I trust I am a consistent Conservative and Churchman, and supporter of Disraeli."

"Of course you are, Mr. Blake," gasped Sir John. "Lord bless me! I don't mean you. Didn't you know that my son Jack was a Radical?"

"No," said Jemmy, in intense surprise, wondering in that case which way the wind would turn.

"A Radical, Sir! His father's son, and an infernal Radical, Sir! Tests abolition—no church-rates—manhood suffrage—vote by ballot!"

And Sir John checked for more wind.

"Well?" said Jemmy presently, who waited for Sir John to continue, and work out the case.

"Well!" puffed Sir John, looking at him in indignant astonishment.

"What am I to do?" asked Jemmy, as Sir John seemed too blown to be more explicit.

"Do? why, go in and win, of course; and God speed you!"

"And do I count on your support, Sir John?" asked the candidate, who began to see that matters were not so black as they had looked a minute ago.

"You shall have my vote, Sir, as I told you a week ago, and my best wishes; and as for influence—why,

that must go as you like to interpret it. I never attempt to coerce my tenants—they know what my opinions are, and are welcome, if they like, since the franchise has been given them, to follow the lead of a—ahem! perhaps older and more experienced man than the—ahem! majority of them; but that is all; no compulsion—no Radical rattening, because each man has his own opinion;” and Sir John again paused for wind.

“You are very good, Sir John,” said Jemmy, with a feeling of intense relief. “Then it is really your wish that I should stand against your son?”

“It is my son’s wish to stand against you, you mean, Sir. It’s a wise father that knows his own son, Sir. Egad! I never knew that mine was such a fool. What chance can he have? It’s the best thing in the world that could happen to you—a Liberal and an ‘advanced Liberal’ cutting each other’s throats against you; for no one, Tory or Radical, will ever shake old Kenyon’s seat; he’s a decent Tory under a Liberal name. Keeps the name for the sake of office; but he’ll never allow tests abolition, or no church-rates, or any such ruffianism. No truckling to continental powers for him; he stands on his motto for every English subject, ‘*Civis Romanus sum.*’ No, you won’t beat him, any of you; but Master Jack will cut Cook’s throat for you, as well as his own, if you put your shoulder to the wheel like a man!”

“I hope I shall, Sir John,” said Jemmy, who saw matters more *coulour de rose* than before.

“As far as canvassing,” continued the baronet, “I think I had best be neutral. I am ready to put down my mite for the good cause, as you know;” and Jemmy

again began to mumble thanks; "and as for my son Jack, I believe he thinks I am to pay all his expenses into the bargain. No, I tell him: I'll do my duty by him, but I'm about blest if I do any more. I'll stand him a thousand towards expenses; if he is worth the carting, his party can find the rest. I have given him my word not to canvass, or put the screw on against him—the last, of course, I should not do against anyone—and I have promised to double his allowance if he gets in; so if you want to do me a good turn, keep him out, if it is only to save me a cool seven hundred a-year. I think that is as much as any father can be expected to do for a son in the Opposition! he can't have the cheek to ask for more; it's seething a kid in its mother's milk. By Jove it is!" and Sir John looked up with an attempt at the air of a martyr, which his jolly and rubicund visage completely belied. "I'd ask you to come over and dine with us to-morrow," said he again presently, when he had got his breath; "but you see Jack's there; and if he were to meet you, there might be a row, you know."

"I hope not so bad as that," said Jemmy, ignoring his animosity to Jack upon another score, in his anxiety to disabuse Sir John of such an estimate of his antipathy. "There is no reason," said he pertinently, "why we should not feel quite as friendly to each other as before in social matters, even if we are to be opposed in politics."

"Well, will you come, then?" said Sir John, who reflected that perhaps he had judged others by the standard of his own pugnacious disposition. "Family party, you know; a quiet rubber, and we will bar shop for the evening, and keep off dangerous topics."

So Jemmy, having reflected that Clara Vane had gone east a fortnight ago, and feeling quite competent to hold his own against Jack Marshall, accepted the offer, as he tucked Sir John into his phaeton.

“Mind you keep this call of mine dark,” was Sir John’s parting admonition ; and Jemmy took off his hat in obedient acquiescence as the phaeton rolled off.





## CHAPTER XXIV

### GOING TO THE COUNTRY.

**T** was at the close of the evening of the following day, when Sir John had been holding honours as thick as a Peninsular veteran, and landing a good score points from Jemmy Blake, who grudged no such trivial disagreement so long as he could enjoy a quiet evening at Ashton-Grove unmolested by Miss Vane, and after Jack Marshall had sung himself to sleep at the expense of having first irretrievably ruined old Lady Marshall's doze by his passionate, not to say discordant, rendering of the "Warrior dead," that a well-drilled flunkey brought in, ready-ironed and cut, the *Times* of the day, which had miscarried its usual train, and the Ashton *Mercury*, which had just made its weekly appearance that Saturday afternoon.

And as the rubber was concluded, and it was late for another set, Jemmy took advantage of the flunkey's advent to order his dogcart, and took the half of the *Times* which Sir John proffered him.

Jemmy did not care much for the money-articles ; but noted with satisfaction that Taw Vale and International Telegraph shares were rising pleasantly, and then chuckled over the paragraph under "Sporting Intelligence," which announced to the public the acceptances for the Liverpool Grand National Steeplechase, among them Lord of the Valley, and Tomfool to make running for him if necessary, and observed with a sort of pride in the estimate that the public held of his lordship, that the latter headed the poll of the betting quotations at as little as 100 to 8, three weeks before the race.

His attention was slightly attracted for a second by a stifled grunt or chuckle from Sir John over the table ; but the latter was deeply veiled and hidden in a sheet of the *Times*, and such ejaculations and soliloquies were so common with the worthy banker, especially when well pleased with himself, his dinner, and his rubber, that Jemmy, seeing no further announcement apparently forthcoming, as Sir John adjusted his spectacles, and applied himself to the type more diligently than before, took no more notice, and betook himself for solace to the pickings of the police-reports ; till Sir John, having completed the paragraph which had excited his interest and astonishment, deliberately laid down his paper, pulled off his spectacles, and turning to the dormant Jack, exclaimed—"Well, Jack, my boy, that's not so bad for you, after all ; there's nothing like having a good opinion of oneself, or, to put it mildly, taking care to do oneself justice. It aint badly written either ; no bad grammar,—decent sentences ; who combed it out for you, hey?" And Jack, who, under the influence of a



nudge from Blanche Marshall, had sat up in his chair during the last sentence or two, mumbled out that he did not know what the governor was driving at. "You've been asleep, man; you didn't hear what I was saying. I was only complimenting you upon your address. It's pretty fair, of its sort, for you, taken as a whole."

"My address?" quoth Jack, who was gradually awakening, and gratefully swallowing a cup of lukewarm tea which Blanche had handed to him.

"Yes, your address, man alive! that's all; it aint worth talking about," finished Sir John testily, sitting back in his chair, and taking up his paper again, as he observed Jack's stupified face, and fancied that the claret and the nap together had obfuscated him.

"My address! you'll see it to-morrow, I hope," said Jack. "I drew it up with Moore this afternoon. I am afraid it aint in time for the *Mercury*; but he's to have the bills out to-morrow, and to send it up at once to the *Times* and daily papers."

"Why, you silly, I've got it here now already."

"Well, it does not much matter your seeing it, but I told Moore not to let anyone have a copy till it came out in print;" and Jack prepared to lounge back again.

"Print! it's staring me in the face now, here; in the *Times*, man! You're so muddled you forget what you're talking about."

"The *Times*!" said Jack slowly, and reaching out his hand for the paper. "Impossible! I tell you it was not cooked up till to-day."

"D'ye think I'm such a fool that I can't read, because

you're so fuddled that you see double?" said Sir John crossly.

"Papa, don't be so rude; you shouldn't talk like that," interpleaded Blanche, who saw Jack looking as black as thunder.

"It's a forgery!" roared Jack in the next breath, as he dashed down the *Times*; "a wicked, scandalous forgery! Disgraceful trick to play upon any gentleman!—Have I to thank you for this, Mr. Blake?" was his next interrogatory, as Jemmy had caught up the paper to search for the bogus address.

"I'll lay you a guinea to a gooseberry he knows nothing of it," laughed Sir John, as he caught Jemmy's look of ludicrous astonishment, while Jack angrily repeated his query, ere Jemmy seemed to understand that it was meant for him.

"Most certainly not, Mr. Marshall," replied Mr. Blake with quiet dignity; "I assure you I know nothing of the matter; in fact, unless you had told me, I should not have suspected that there was anything wrong in it," he added, wishing to pour oil on the waters, but only succeeding in riling Jack still further.

"Not have known it, Sir; do you wish to insult me, Mr. Blake?" he spluttered, while Sir John sank back in his chair, and gasped and roared with laughter.

"I am very sorry if anything has annoyed you," said Jemmy, in a still more dignified, stolid tone, contrasting ill with the broad humour of his countenance; "I repeat that I do not know, nor have any clue to the matter. I hope that will satisfy you."

"What's the use of making such a rumpus?" quoth

Sir John, who had found a second wind. "It's nothing to be ashamed of; a deuced neat address, I call it. Stick to it, Jack, if it's fathered on you; you'll never write a better if you live as long as I have."

And taking up the sheet again, Sir John readjusted his spectacles, cleared his throat, and saying, "Hold hard, and listen all of you," led off and read as follows:

*"To the free and independent Electors of East Valeshire.*

"GENTLEMEN,—Unsolicited (yet, I modestly trust, not altogether unappreciated) by you, I have thought fit to come forward as a candidate for your confidence at the impending election. It is true that I cannot candidly say that I have been dragged forward by any especial or influential deputation from among you" ("By Jove, you're right there!" said Sir John); "but time is short, I must guard against forestalment and anticipation, and so—in the consciousness that should the deputation still send to me it will have the satisfaction of meeting me half-way, and should it not appear I need not have wasted time in waiting for it—I have at once appealed to your sympathies and coöperation." ("They'll think you're coming round with a charity-box.") "I confess that at present I know little of your political opinions in particular, nor of those of the world at large in general; but with reference to the former I cannot, I am sure, do better than in purest charity judge you by myself." ("Hard lines on them!" interposed Sir John.) "And with regard to the latter clause you will, I trust, see with me the immense expediency of being represented by an individual who is thus so closely assimilated with yourselves" ("In being

a d—d fool," grunted Sir John *sotto voce*), "and who therefore is at present a free agent uncontaminated by party bias or prejudice.

"I profess myself in favour of civil and religious liberty, and would gladly see penal laws enforced against all such who differ from this code. I am an advocate for a full extension of the suffrage; that all classes and occupations may have their interests and stake in society duly represented." ("That pickpockets may elect an Artful Dodger for the borough of Saffron-hill, to move the demolishment of Newgate," again interlarded Sir John.) "And I am also strongly in favour of the preservation of peace and extension of commerce, and sincerely approve of the proposed expedition to bombard Yang-ho, should the selfish policy of its government continue to close its ports to the enterprise of British merchants. I trust before long to have an opportunity of addressing you in person, and then unfolding more fully to you my political principles.

"Soliciting meantime your kind support and coöperation, I am, gentlemen,

"Your obedient servant,

"JOHN MARSHALL, Jun "

"*Ashton Grove*, Feb. 8."

"And a deuced candid and good exposition of Radical creed, I call it, Jack," said Sir John, when he had done. "Take my advice, man; let well alone, and put the stopper on Moore before he spoils this; you'll never have a better, if you wait till doomsday." And Sir John again sank back and chuckled grimly.

"Are you sure that you yourself did not write that, since you seem so much to admire it, Sir?" interrogated Jack sternly and deliberately.

"Not I, Jack," panted Sir John, in no way offended at the insinuation. "On my honour, I know no more about it than you or Mr. Blake. I cheat fair, all the world over; you needn't suspect that I should turn against you behind your back, when I could, if I liked, upset you to your face."

And as, at this moment, Mr. Blake's dogcart was announced, that gentleman thought it was time to take his leave, which he did with great cordiality from Sir John, who had not finished chuckling as he saw Jemmy to the door; but Jack Marshall looked so black and bitter that Jemmy at first doubted whether he meant to shake hands with him at all, and only at the last was offered the most feeble manipulation from a flabby paw, and a sulky "Good-evening, Mr. Blake;" which to judge by the expression of the speaker, might far easier have been interpreted, "Perdition seize thee!" than any other phrase of English vocabulary.



## CHAPTER XXV

### A WET CANVASS.

**O**N the Monday, Ralph Romilly came down with the working portion of his stud to finish the season at Old Vale House.

Keston Gorse was the meet, and, as usual, a sure find. A thick, tangled cover, it took a great deal of drawing; but before the hounds had been thrown in for five minutes Ned Masters was standing up in his stirrups, signalling silently to Dan, who was watching the working of the few sterna that peeped here and there over the tops of the furze-bushes.

A grand dog-fox with a white tag on his brush had stolen out on the east side, where the presence of a gigantic open drain, deep enough to engulf man and horse, and a good quarter of a mile long, tempted many to wait, while there was a bridge handy three hundred yards down on the south end.

So the poacher unmolested had already safely crossed

the drain and pointed straight for the Tan woods, the only vestige of shelter for six miles, before Dan's horn and halloo had sounded to call the hounds on to the line, but without in the least accelerating the pace of the fox, who knew that he had a fair start, and moreover a long journey before him. So he led them merrily over three miles of the sweetest grass and blackthorn of the Old Vale, the hounds running compact upon a holding scent, and only about a dozen horses, who had been pushed straight at the drain in question, the instant that the horn had sounded, at all handy to them. The rest of the field, who had gone round by the bridge, were scattered in various directions, and Sir John had led a brigade that made the fortune for the day of the old pike-keeper at Keston-bar.

And now, dead in front of them, at the misty end of a hundred-acre water-meadow, close couched in its banks, fringed with its willows, which alone betrayed its whereabouts to distant comers, flowed the Upper Glyde, that humid bugbear of the Old Vale. No Kühlbörn ever damped so much ardour or checked so many adventurers from Undine as did that river-god in exacting penalties from trespassers in pursuit of Diana — just small enough to be disqualified as a river, just big enough as a brook to be "main awkward," as Dan expressed it when his rat-tailed bay had a fortnight before got bogged in his take-off, filled his rider's pockets with water, and horn with black mud.

But Dan knew the best approach and best landing on the present occasion ; and Bluster, who had been pulling Ralph's arms out of the sockets since the start, made no

mistake about it this time, as he went at it like a grampus, and, with the least bit of scrambling and skating on the landing, settled down again in his stride with an extra kick and pull to compensate himself for the exertion.

And Jemmy, sitting snugly on a new purchase, who had taken the place of Lord of the Valley now that the latter had been promoted exclusively to lighter duties—a long raking bay mare, nearly thoroughbred, fired on both hocks, but sound withal, with ample pace and jumping power, and considerable faculty for pulling—came down like a glutton in his own line, nearly abreast of his cousin and huntsman, and in close company with six or seven “good goers” of the season’s adventurers in the Old Vale, who had been doing their jealous best to override the hounds, till the racing pace of the last mile had placed the beauties in safety with a field clear lead.

“Vixen,” the new purchase, had fenced *con amore* since they left Keston Gorse, and what with the pace, and the exertion of restraining the maid’s impetuosity, Mr. Blake was already in a fair state of perspiration. Picking his place straight in front of him, catching short hold of the Vixen’s head, and warming her ribs with the spurs, he came thundering by the sedge tussocks down to the brink; and the Vixen seeing the duty, nothing loth, cocked her ears, and was gathering her rush, when an ill-conditioned water-hen flushed *malapropos* out of a tussock on the whip-hand, and in her terror almost flapping the Vixen’s nose, sent that lady’s head wildly and disdainfully in the air, caused her to balk her stride and change her legs, and in another instant, with a skew-spring, a crash, and a splash, Mr. Blake found himself half blinded with muddy-water, his



hat washed behind him and half strangling him with the safety band, and his person in general moister than was conducive to his comfort or suitable to his previous state of perspiration.

The pace and power of the Vixen's spring had all but cleared the twenty-foot of water, and the master's elbows were on the *terra firma* of a rush-bed, as he shook his feet from the stirrups, and sought the aid of a willow-bough overhead to hook himself on his legs ashore.

The Vixen with the wind pretty well shaken out of her, lay passive for a minute or so, her head stretched out on the reeds, her hind-quarters dragging in the flood, till Jemmy began to fear that a broken back had reduced his ninety-guinea purchase to the value of the hide and shoes, and a supply for the kennel-boiler; but by the time that the leaders had swept a quarter of a mile away, a couple more had found a similar watery level, and half-a-dozen followers stopped to contemplate from the other side the uncertainty of human prospects, as they beheld a draggled plunger besmearing his buckskins as he sat on the brink, holding helplessly, yet perseveringly, to the bridle of his swimming quadruped, and the white stern of a brother officer conspicuously visible as he scrambled all-fours up the bank from his bath. The Vixen seemed disposed to think that all was not over yet, and raising herself on her fore-legs with a convulsive shake and a struggle, extricated her lower limbs, planting a stumbling toe ruthlessly upon the master's agonised foot, floundered once more upon her knees and head, and then rose up panting, dripping, and trembling, but apparently in no other way the worse for her fall and immersion.

Not so the M.F.H. The westerly wind whistled chilly through his dripping integuments; the sudden check to perspiration was delightfully conducive to lumbago in prospect; he had lost his start and place; the only vestige of the line of run was to be traced through the tail of the scanty dozen who had safely manipulated the Glyde; and the last of them was disappearing through an imperious bullfinch two hundred yards distant.

However, he lost no time in scrambling back to his saddle, shuddering from head to foot as he settled down to the chilled and clammy recesses, and kicked the Vixen along in the track of the last visible horseman.

The Vixen, decidedly subdued by her fall in the world, lurched considerably as she strode over the water-meadow, and pecked, as if from distress, on landing through the bullfinch, a prickly brier lovingly entwined round the M.F.H.'s windpipe. However, she partially recovered herself as she warmed to her work, and had fairly overhauled a brace of predecessors, when, a quarter of an hour later, Jemmy checked her for an instant under the boundary-fence of the Tan woods and listened for the distant music of the pack, who were rattling their fox merrily through the underwood, too close to give him time to turn had he the inclination, and forcing him immediately to set his head once more for the open, and try, as a last resource, the earths of Claycross Warrens, still four weary miles in advance.

No chance of making up lost ground in cover, and shoving along by the lower side of the underwood, Mr. Blake had the satisfaction of seeing three or four leaders in pink sailing clear away from the farther end, as he

splashed through an open gateway and reached the limit of the Tan woods.

There was nothing for it but a stern chase, and but that the Vixen seemed for the time being, if anything, improved rather than the worse for wear since she had picked herself out of the Glyde, there would have been little chance that the master should see anything more of his hounds in action for that day. "Just his luck too! About the best run of the season, and to get thrown out by an infernal moorhen;" and the usually placid Mr. Blake indulged in a modified, but for him forcible, anathema.

Another two miles of strong pace, with more fallow interlarded with the grass of the Vale than pleased the master, especially as he felt the Vixen beginning now and then to require stimulants at her fences out of heavy ground; and though he had grimly chuckled at a couple of enthusiasts worshipping the mother of all as he passed them in detail, and had been thrown out of his stride and nearly brought to grief himself by a riderless roan that insisted on following the line upon his own hook, yet of the hounds not one glimpse could he obtain; and, mute as they were running, still less could his ear help or guide. But two or three far-distant pinks, careering and glancing ever and anon through the vista of fences ahead, still served to keep him on his line; and he understood by now the point for which the fox was making, and could at the worst make straight for that on "spec."

It was with mingled feelings of congratulation and chagrin, that he, a mile farther on, observed flashes of pink swinging sharp round to his left just as the Vixen had,

unasked, compounded to a trot at a small rising ground, and five minutes later, after having kicked her through rather than over, four or five intervening thorn-fences and carried away a whole flight of providentially rotten rails, he jogged up in time to see Dan, surrounded by a limited group of eight dismounted horsemen, who were slackening girths and otherwise endeavouring to conduce to the comfort of pumped-out quadrupeds, dismembering the remnants of the white-tagged fox, while his pack *vis-à-vis* panting and bayed for their prey.

"You were out of it that journey, old boy," said Ralph by way of condolence, as they led their horses through a couple of hand-gates into the London road. "How came the mare to put you down? I thought you bought her with a high character for water."

"It was a darned moorhen balked us," said Jemmy in melancholy, as he shivered in his clammy cords, and wondered how far he was from home.

"Hard lines that! You missed one of the prettiest things that I have seen this season; however, I dare say you sinned in very good company, judging by the limited lot who were with us in Tan woods. That Glyde water chokes off a good many; it was your turn this time. Don't you remember how you did us one day when Ruby and I got into it lower down, near the Cross dingles?" And Jemmy failed to obtain any comfort from the recollection that Ralph had got a couple of bootfuls of water three months previously.

"Look here!" said Ralph, half-an-hour later, as they jogged wearily into a hamlet of small tenements which a local Peabody had erected, with a few acres of land at-

tached to each, with a view of imparting agriculture and the franchise to sundry enterprising clodhoppers at the lowest possible scale of rental. "Never waste an opportunity. You must canvass one or two of these ruffians as we go past; who knows but that Jack Marshall and Moore may be here to-morrow, and cut you out!"

"I'm so wet," said Jemmy piteously, as he shivered at the thought of delay.

"Can't help that," quoth Ralph obdurately. "These votes are worth on the average a fiver apiece, and you won't pay as much as that to the doctor to cure you, even if you do catch lumbago. Come on!" and he signalled a ragged urchin, the scion of one of the freeholders, to hold the horses, as he pulled up at the gate of the nearest tenement.

Ascertaining from the ragamuffin the name of the proprietor, Ralph mercilessly ushered Jemmy in, and seating himself when invited upon a broken-backed chair, proceeded to coax and caress a dubious and dirty-looking baby that was snivelling on the floor.

Jemmy introduced himself, as he took the proffered seat by the fireside, and entered into converse with the master of the house, who was just completing a repast of bread-and-dripping. In a few words he made known the purport of his visit, and further, regardless of the vocal interruption of a brace of porkers who were squealing for their dinners in a farther corner of the room, proceeded as tersely as possible, for he dreaded evaporation and rheumatism, to unfold his political creed and tenets.

"Nary!" interrupted the tenant in a minute or two,

when he had interrogated Jemmy insinuatingly as to whether he was a Churchman, and received a cordial answer in the affirmative. "Ye won't do for me then, I'm afeard ; ar shall voote for summun as ull go for fewer parsons and moore fat pegs !" and the host took a large bite of dripping from a rusty knife to clench the question.

"Allow me to explain," said Jemmy nervously, anxious not to be misunderstood. "My support of the Established Church cannot in any way prejudice the interests of agriculture, in which I am gratified to observe you so agreeably engaged ; and you must be aware, my good Sir, that as an Englishman you are a free man, and welcome to do as you please in this question of your pigs and live stock, without any fear of interference from government, or—"

"Nary !" again interrupted the chawbacon. "Tell'ee yer warn't do for us. Pegs, and no parsons, says I."

"Surely—" again attempted Jemmy.

"Nary parsons," continued the lout, settling himself into his fustian-jacket, and preparing to be off to his work. "Pegs, says I, and no parsons."

And Jemmy rose also, attempting one more word, but peremptorily checked again by the dictum,

"Pegs, and no parsons."

So he civilly bade adieu, and sought the door ; whither Ralph, wiping off a slobbering kiss received from his charge, was fain to follow him.

The succeeding tenement was in no way more civilised than its predecessor ; a shaggy pony, tethered by a leg-shackle, in a bit of paddock ; a scanty crop of onions, feebly endeavouring to peep above ground ; a half-load

of manure, the other half of which had been indifferently shaken out a month before, lying across the path, in the middle of what might have been once meant for a flower-garden, but which was so exclusively devoted to a thick cover of weeds and dead nettles, that Jemmy might have half-expected to put up an old jack-hare from the shelter, had it not been for the hang-dog, poacher-like aspect of the proprietor, who met them at the doorway, and rubbing his nose on his shirtsleeve, showed the way into his dwelling, and proffered an inverted tub for the accommodation of his vistsors, remarking, "it war main broad enough for two."

He was not long in divining the object of Mr. Blake's visit, and with grins of sly satisfaction assented instantaneously, with "Ah, sure ! ar can voate for yer," as he turned away as if to arrange some crockery on a three-legged table, and held out his grimy palm surreptitiously behind him.

Jemmy ventured to utter his thanks, nor noticed the extended flipper, till Ralph nudged him, to draw his attention to it ; but Mr. Blake had neither the facility nor the inclination to pay for the support he craved ; for what little coin he had with him could only be unearthed from his wet and contracted breeches-pockets at the expense of introducing a new draught of cold air.

So he thought it best to take his friend at his word and ignore the posterior palm, and when the tenant turned himself in due time round again, having in detail fingered all the cups on the tea-table, he held out his hand boldly to shake an adieu ; and the host, again saying, "Ah, p'r'aps ar can do what yer want," closed upon Jemmy's

ungloved hand and fingered it carefully, while a cloud of dissatisfaction stole over his face.

"Well, ar'll think aboot it, and ye can call agin," was his final remark, when he had scanned the muddy floor and satisfied himself that no valuables had unawares escaped him and fallen there ; "ar'll think about it."

"I thought I understood you just now, Sir, that I might depend upon you for your kind support?" said Jemmy hesitatingly.

• "Ah, well, ar'll think aboot it, and ye can call agin," was the ultimatum; and with that Jemmy had to be content.

"Ar'll tak' a peer o' breeches for ma voote," said the owner of the next tenement, coming at once boldly and simply to the point.

"I am sorry to say I have none to exchange with you, my good friend," said Jemmy, good-humouredly, not quite sure whether he was being chaffed or not.

"Ah, well, ar must ha' some breeches," once more said the voter unconcernedly, putting his hands into the pockets of his own string-mended "continuations," as if to draw attention to their dilapidation.

"I am afraid I can't give you any," said Jemmy ; "but I hope that will not prevent you from giving me your support as a free and independent voter in this election."

"If you arn't got no breeches for me, Muster Cook and Muster Marshall has, I warrant ; so it's no account," said the elector independently.

"My good man," said Jemmy severely, "do you know, are you not aware, that bribery and corruption are strictly prohibited?"



"Oi don't know nou't aboot broibery ; and am not aweer o' no corruption," rising and sniffing cautiously around the den to verify his assertion. "But, say oi, no breeches, no voote ; so ye can do as yer ha' a mind."

And Jemmy and Ralph resigned the case as hopeless.

"Iss ; ten shilling !" promptly replied the next tenant interrogated, with far more modesty and less rapacity than his predecessors.

"I am afraid I can't afford to buy your vote, my good Sir," said Jemmy, calmly. "May I not hope that you can give me your good will, and yet forego the payment of such a trifling sum as you mention ?"

"Troifling soom ! in course it be ; and you call yersel' a gen'elman, and can't give an honest man ten shillin' for his vote : I'm ashamed on yer !"

And Jemmy went back to his horse in despair.

"I must leave these fellows to the agents ; they know better than I do how to manage them," said he sulkily, as he shivered down in his saddle.

"You can't expect better of such ruffians ; if philanthropists will make fagot-votes, they only succeed in setting discontent blazing, and in all probability enabling their fagot-holders to burn more permanently in a future state. These puny qualified tenants are a long chalk below the common honest labourer or artisan ; they swagger as landholders, think it *infra dig.* to send their children to national schools, and can't afford to send them to any better place for education. They can afford to get drunk every other day, instead of only on Saturday nights, like the common labourer. They don't know a rap about farming ; their land is too small to be worth starting a

plough and team ; it is too much for hand-culture, and they won't amalgamate to keep a horse or harrow between half-a-dozen. It rots itself, and ruins them ; and don't pay half the rental that it would if combined even in a small hundred-acre holding. And this is what democrats—who hold that the 'English peasantry is divorced from the soil'—would bring us all to, if they had their own way."

And Ralph lit a weed to blow off his steam of indignation.

"They're none of them my tenants," said Jemmy, "so I don't much care whether they pay their rents or fail ; but this element of bribery is a bore, if it is to run far. I don't expect Jack Marshall can do much on his own hook, and Sir John won't find him the coin for that game ; but if that fellow Cook takes to it, he can buy us all up."

And Jemmy took a light from his cousin, to solace himself with a havannah.

"The most iniquitous thing," said Ralph in his staunch Toryism, "that was ever done, after the old Reform Bill, was the disallowing of bribery and corruption. If we are to swamp intellect and position, at least let money have its value. Wealth always presupposes a certain extent of education and intelligence, else why do we take a financial value as the test of a man's capacity to vote, instead of subjecting him to a competitive examination at once ? If bribery *is* to be stopped, it must be made penal, not punished by mere loss of privilege ; but I hold that it is perfectly justifiable, and should be made legitimate."

"Why so ?" asked Jemmy, while Ralph took a pull at his weed to keep it going.

“Because every man votes, and will vote for what is his own interest ; that’s why Socrates draws his ironical doctrine of ‘justice being the interest of the stronger.’ The very creed that *classes* should be represented, and under classes individuals, would be superfluous, if each class voted for public good. No ; each class votes for its own private good, and by balance struck through majorities we deduce in a rough way what is public good, or, at all events, public evil to the smallest possible proportion of the representation.”

“What has that to do with the right of a man to sell his vote ?”

“Just this ; each voter has his own interests, and will vote for the man who will best represent them. A farmer wants the tax off malt ; a Baptist abominates church-rates ; a Coventry weaver wants a heavy duty upon foreign fabrics ; a coal-heaver, if he has a vote, wants the duty off beer, of course — if he drinks his three quarts a-day. Well, go to each of those men, ask him what he wants legislated by the next parliament, and what difference it will make to his income, supposing he gets what he wants. Then—by mere law of chances and probabilities, if it is even betting against his man getting in, evens again against his man’s party carrying their motion when it comes on, and, last of all, even money that the representative turns round and sells his constituents when he has once got in — it is just seven to one against the voter getting what he wants accomplished ; that’s mere arithmetic. Just so ; so you say to the sinner, ‘Your interests are different from mine ; but even if you secure them this session, you will be only—say twenty pounds the richer ;

at seven to one your chance is not worth then fifty shillings—a bird in the hand is worth ten in the bush—you had better take my fiver for a certainty, and then vote for me and my interests—so we square and satisfy all parties.’ The man’s a fool if he doesn’t sell, aint he? Charity begins at home for him and duty too; he must look after his own interests, and so he does.”

“But you argue on the supposition that a vote is a right; is it not rather a trust?” asked Jemmy.

“A trust? it ought to be, but it isn’t.” Radicals can’t eat their cake and have it too. If a vote, as they say, is a birthright to every Englishman, for Heaven’s sake, let the rogue sell it as soon as he can, like Esau, to some one who can make better use of it. If it is a trust, there comes the folly of the thing; we trust men with the common weal who think of nothing but their own aims and ends; we give those a trust who have no trustworthiness about them, who show it by their ignorance and prove it by venality. Why did we ever extend the franchise? why seek now to lower it still further? If the franchise is a birthright, well and good—put it up to auction. If it is a trust, why repose confidence in the uneducated masses, who are open to every temptation, rather than the *élite* of society, who have more education and refinement, and fewer snares to upset them. I don’t say that *they* are infallible—none are; but still less so are the masses; the masses should be mildly represented—not led in to flood constituencies; if they are, we must buy them, for we cannot beat them out: so I come back to my original creed—two wrongs must make a right. If you trust, trust only the worthy; if you cede a birthright, cede also

the power to dispose of it. You can't persuade a pauper that the ethereal prestige of a vote is of more substantial value than breeches and blankets. Thank goodness, there's the lodgagate. I'll finish my weed in the billiard-room," concluded Ralph, as he relighted the long ago defunct cabana.





## CHAPTER XXVI.

### CENTRAL ATTRACTION.

**T**HE next day Mr. Blake went over to the Maule to consult with Lady Mary; Colonel Warren had turned up in England on Twelfth-night, and after a ten days' sojourn at the Maule had taken his daughter back with him to the house on the Steyne at Brighton; and Lady Mary finding the Maule dull when bereft of the sunlight of both Ruby and Georgie, had gone for a fortnight to Lord Valehampton in Sussex, and to cultivate her nieces, Ralph's sisters, of whom she had seen but little these last two years.

She had just returned in time for the turmoil of the election, and had barely settled down the next day, when Jemmy, attired yeoman-like in velveteen coat, white cords, and gaiters, walked over from Orleton station, a good hour in advance of lunch-time.

"I want you, aunt, to let your agent canvass your Claycross tenants for me—he knows more about them

than I do, and no doubt can help me a good deal," said Jemmy, when the first greetings were over.

"I heard of your coming forward for the county when I was with my brother," said she; "I think it is a very good thing for you, though you will have as much as ever you can do; if you are to carry on the hounds and the house too, you will want someone to go into partnership with you, to take work off your hands."

And Jemmy smiled grimly as she said this, though she noticed it not.

"About the agent, Aunt Mary," said he, bringing her back to the point.

"O yes, tell him what you like—I have no doubt it is all right. Cecil (Valehampton) wanted to know how much each vote was going to cost you—he said you would not get in under ten thousand pounds. I hope it is not going to cost all that. I am sure my tenants shall vote the right way without being paid for it—they shall all have notice to quit if they do not."

"I hope not," said Jemmy, amused; "let them have plenty of rein, and they will be all the better for it. Your threats, Aunt Mary, would be as bad as those trades-union rattenings which everybody is making such a fuss about; and, as for bribery, I don't mean to buy a single vote. Kenyon is safe to get in. The other seat lies between old Cook, Jack Marshall and myself. Jack can't afford to bribe—Sir John stands him a thousand towards expenses, and his committee, if he can get one up, will have to find the rest; *he* can't buy me out, that's certain. I'm not so sure that old Cook will not, but our agents have laid a trap or two for him, and we must hope

to unseat in committee, if he beats us at the poll by unfair means."

"Well, I suppose you are right, Jemmy; I didn't mean to intimidate—at least, I see that I was running the risk of doing so. You shall give your own orders to Owen, or dictate to me what I shall write to him, and I hope he will be able to carry the votes for you.—Of course you are going to Lady Kenilworth's ball?" she added, branching off on a new topic.

"No, I aint," said Jemmy tersely, who felt that he had had enough of balls for some time past.

"You'll throw away chances if you don't, Jemmy. You've no decent excuse for shirking, and you can't afford to lose Lord Kenilworth's support in the election by offending him. Don't be silly; go, and make yourself agreeable and popular; every young lady you dance with may be worth her father's support for all you know, if you manage her judiciously."

"How on earth is anyone to know who's who, or who I am, if we are all to black our faces like a troop of niggers?" said Jemmy petulantly. "It is rather a strange freak of Lady Kenilworth's to mask everyone."

"But you need not wear the crape any lower than the bridge of the nose, so it won't be very uncomfortable."

"And I suppose," said Jemmy sardonically, "the men will recognise who's who by dresses and ornaments—many of them keep much the same sets of the latter; and, as for gentlemen, none of us wear a variety of studs and watchchains."

"As if a lot of casual girls that one only sees once in



a way would have learnt your watchchains by heart, or you remember them by the number of bows and flounces ! They get so torn to pieces that a skirt is not likely to do duty many times ; and besides, they would take good care not to show at two balls running in the same colours. It's plain that you never had a wife and daughter of your own, *Jemmy*."

"No, I don't think I had," said *Jemmy* ; "but what you say only makes the thing more useless. If no one is to know who I am, what's the good of my buttering a lot of young women on the off-chance of my getting round their governors ?"

"Well, do as you like ; anyhow, try to persuade *Ralph* to come and squire us. *Ruby* will not, I fear, get leave out of college for the night. *Georgie* is coming down again for it ; and I have asked your other cousins, *May* and *Ada Romilly*, to meet her at *Three Bridges*, and journey down with her. I must have some escort ; and if neither of you will come, I must beard the *Warden of Merton* in his den, and beg license for *Ruby* in person."

"I don't think that *Ralph* will come if he can help it. The *Kenilworths* don't provide rubbers in the corners as a rule, and are still less likely to do so on this occasion, if they insist on everyone being masked, and make that novelty the main attraction, such as it is. I suppose I must give in, and go with you," he added in a tone of resignation, reflecting that he anyhow, in such a case, would have ample opportunity to note *Georgie's* costume before she disguised herself, and wait and dance accordingly.

"Introductions will be void, I suppose, for the night,"

said Lady Mary. "Of course it will be a farce to introduce *incognitos*. So everyone will be presumed to be on equally intimate footing for the time."

"Rather a curious idea, but it will be a carefully-selected company ; in a private house it won't make much difference, and the novelty and confusion will be rather amusing," said Jemmy, who was now warming to the idea, and wondering whether Jack Marshall would be there. Anyhow, there was one comfort, Clara Vane was not to be at Ashton ; and if she were, she would not recognise him : so for once he was safe.

So Jemmy intimated his willingness to render himself useful and agreeable to the female population of the Maule for the occasion of Lady Kenilworth's impending *bal masqué*, and to come over to dine and sleep at his aunt's on that day, that they might the more easily journey together to and fro in the evening.

Mr. Blake then applied himself to lunch, and, that completed, walked back again to the Orleton station, declining the lift of the Maule carriage on the plea that the exercise would improve his dinner and keep him in wind.

At the junction he met Algernon Paget, just down from town by the express, on his way to the rectory, which he had unaccountably and cruelly neglected since Colonel Warren had returned from abroad. Paget had with him the *Times* and *Standard*, each containing an indignant facsimile letter from Jack Marshall, repudiating the bogus address in violent terms, and crowded with as many personalities to the Opposition candidates as the respective editors had not thought absolutely necessary, with regard to their own, if not his, respectability, to ex-

purgate. The *Standard*, of course, maintained to the world, in a leader on the subject, that "there was every excuse for the acceptance of the forgery, and belief for the time in the hoax ; for that, after all, there was nothing in the address which, on careful inspection, might not have been fairly attributed to a Radical candidate ; and condoling with Mr. Marshall upon the ill-luck that had already set his own authorised address " (which of course, was vowed immeasurably inferior by-the-bye) "in type so close upon the heels of the false one, that there was no time to withdraw the second one and sign acquiescence in the excellent one that had taken his name in vain."

And the "Thunderer," though indignant at having been hoaxed and made a fool of, and indulging, of course, in a diatribe against the impropriety and indecency of squibs in electioneering, was evidently so stung by the snappish and rude tone of Jack Marshall junior's letter, and its imputations upon the fairness and impartiality of the *Times* in not more carefully scrutinising such a missive before publishing it, that it gave him in turn a rap over the knuckles before the end, and concluded with condolence very similar to that adopted by the *Standard*.

Of course, Algernon Paget knew no more than Jemmy who had been the author of the squib. Ralph Romilly had been taken in by it as much as everyone else, and had not for an instant suspected but that it was genuine ; and Jemmy had forgotten to mention it to Lady Mary, or to think of asking her for any possible hint towards elucidation of the mystery.

Algernon was not so sure about the *bal masqué*. That

sort of thing was more in his line, but it was such a bore not to know who one was dancing with. One might make a mess of the thing, and talk secrets to the wrong party. It might not be bad fun as a means of making general mischief, and setting people by the ears. Jemmy didn't mean to go, did he?

Well, yes ; Jemmy was going to make a martyr of himself, since they wanted some specimen of mankind to make himself useful to the girls of the Maule.

Whereupon Paget, without farther interrogative, sagely opined that Georgie Warren would be among the Maule party ; and his mind was suddenly set on going, at all hazards, to Lady Kenilworth's ball. He at the same time abominated his luck, or indolence, which had led him to dawdle in his Pall-Mall chambers *en déshabille* after breakfast, and so miss the fast morning train. Had he nicked into Lady Mary's presence by lunch-time, he might have come forward as volunteer, and saved poor Jemmy Blake from sacrificing his evening's rest in this unselfish and reckless way.

Ten days later, Georgie Warren, on very good terms with herself and her Romilly cousins, who had not been near the Maule for nearly two years, was in the Paddington waiting-room, practising patience till a porter should earn his fee by labelling luggage and securing seats for the Flying Dutchman, due out in another five minutes.

The lady's-maid in attendance was making her way between the barriers at the ticket-windows, looking up anxiously and helplessly at the clock, as minutes fled recklessly by ; and a cautious old fogey, with essential gingham umbrella and a glaring blue birds'-eye comforter,

was and had been for the last ten minutes haggling over the difference between ordinary and express fares, and lamenting the high charge imposed for the Flying Dutchman's unchecked flight to Swindon direct without break or pause.

The lady's-maid glared angrily at a mild-looking curate, who, with impatient eagerness similar to her own, was modestly, yet earnestly, edging his way inch by inch to the collector's window, and, convinced that he must be a swell-mobsmen with designs upon her pocket, she was clutching her purse cautiously in her hand, when an independent-looking young lady, who had just picked her way out in front of the crowd, safe in possession of her ticket, stopped for an instant as she noticed the face of the abigail, then touching her elbow over the rail, asked of her, as she turned viciously round, prepared with her umbrella to defend her bag and pocket valiantly to the last :

"Who are you here with, Martha ? or are you alone ?"

"Miss Warren is in the waiting-room, Miss—I did not know it was you that touched me—and the Misses Romilly are with her, all waiting for their tickets, if I can ever get nigh them.—Drat the man!" she interpolated with vehemence, as the curate slyly and surreptitiously succeeded in stealing his way past her while she spoke to the lady behind her, and cut her out for the vacancy at the ticket-window.

"If you are going to her, Miss, please be so good as to say that I shall bring the tickets in one 'nother minute, if so be I don't get my pocket picked first!" And Martha looked daggers of insinuation at the curate,

who still lingered at the window, cautiously counting his change.

The next instant Georgie, as she waited patiently in the ladies'-room, felt herself tapped on the shoulder, and thinking that Martha had grown very free and easy in her mode of communication and attracting attention, turned round to find herself *vis-à-vis* with Clara Vane.

Clara of course proffered the kiss of affection, which Georgie could not but accept and reciprocate. It did not require much perception to tell her whither Clara Vane was bound at that hour at the G.W.R. terminus, and her civility hardly expanded into cordiality in consequence. But Clara affectionately made up on her side for shortcomings on Georgie's, and expressed herself delighted with the *rencontre*.

"Where are you off to, dear? To the Maule, I suppose. How nice! And I'm going to Ashton Grove. Isn't it fortunate? And we can travel together so nicely!"

In which pleasure Georgie had no option but to acquiesce, provided there was room in their compartment.

"Sure to be room," said Clara. "I'll make some if there isn't."

And at that instant up came Georgie's porter to escort them to their carriage, carry parcels, and levy, of course, black-mail for his services.

"Get that old gentleman to go somewhere else," said Clara promptly to the official, but unheard by Georgie, as she followed her pioneer up to the half-compartment of broad gauge which had been reserved, and found only three seats available, an elderly and decent-looking arch-deacon of the west countree occupying the vacant seat.

"Tell him we have taken all the seats, and want to smoke, or anything you like, so long as we get the place to ourselves;" and she enforced her demand with a shilling, which made the porter sufficiently mendacious or obsequious to the divine to induce him to transfer himself to another carriage.

"So you are going to the *bal masqué*, dear?" quoth Clara, when the train had got under weigh, and the ceremony of introduction to the Misses Romilly had been gone through. "How delightful! So am I; that's what I'm going down for principally."

"It's a long way to go for one ball," hazarded Georgie, lamenting Clara's enthusiastic preference for Valeshire balls, now that the session had opened, and London was partially waking into life again.

"Oh, but they're such fun, those Old Vale balls; they're worth twenty London ones—we meet such a lot of old friends."

And Georgie tried to endorse the sentiment with a pleasant smile, but failed signally.

But Clara rattled on:—

"And I've got such a love of a dress for it, dear—nearly like yours that you wore on New-year's Eve, and which I admired so much—dove-coloured silk petticoat, and white tulle with gold spangles. You've no idea how sweetly it has made up. I took all the idea from yours, only I think I have improved upon it. I had the upper flounce Vandyke-shaped instead of scolloped, like yours, and it contrasts so much more distinctly."

So Georgie made a splenetic memorandum to abandon the dove-silk and spangled tulle for the future, lest it

should remind her of Clara, and soon started a new line of conversation, as they thundered over Maidenhead Bridge, and viewed Father Thames in the glory of a spring flood—the water-meadows below Francklins at Bray one sheet of water as far as the eye could stretch, beyond Surly and Boveney, and almost up to the walls of Eton chapel; and before they had thundered through the tumble-down wooden structure of Reading, and viewed Caversham reaches, Clara Vane had read herself to sleep over the last number of *London Society*, and left Georgie and her cousins in peace to talk and play backgammon till the inspector of tickets at Swindon broke repose,







## CHAPTER XXVII.

### LADY KENILWORTH'S BAL MASQUÉ.

**S**O Mr. Blake came over to the Maule in time for dinner on the 15th, wishing with all his heart that Lady Kenilworth and her ball were in the bottomless pit, but nevertheless determined to see the thing out to the last, since he could not suffer Georgie's, *i.e.* his, interest to be injured or prejudiced unguardedly for lack of a few hours' penance and careful inspection.

He had not been at Ashton Grove for the last few days, partly because he had no wish to clash with Jack Marshall or lay himself open to the accusation of prejudicing his governor against his politics, and more simply because his kennels and canvass between them pretty well filled his hands from morning to night.

Of Clara Vane's arrival and intended presence at the *bal masqué*, he consequently had not the slightest inkling, and was thus spared much distress of spirit that might otherwise have ruined his peace of mind for days past.

The day for nomination of candidates had been fixed for the 20th; the canvass, so far as it had proceeded, had served to reassure Mr. Blake on one point of anxiety—viz. that there was scant chance that his colours would be lowered by Jack Marshall.

Old Kenyon, the Liberal-Conservative, would of course get in; the brunt of the fight would be between Cook, the former Liberal colleague of Kenyon, and Mr. Blake. The gossip and rumours of the agents seemed to imply that the poll would almost for certain give Cook a majority over Blake; but the latter, who had during his canvass unearthed sundry tittle-tattle and news as to the corrupt tactics and practices on the part of the aforesaid Cook in the previous election, had put his agents and spies on the alert to improve the occasion, and lose no opportunity of quietly securing evidence for a future appeal to the House if the hustings should declare against him.

On the whole, Mr. Blake, though at first inclined to feel annoyed and bitter at being met by unscrupulous bribery, and having neither the conscience nor inclination to sink another three or four thousand pounds in fighting Cook upon his own grounds, had begun to take Ralph Romilly's view of the subject, and agree that perhaps, after all, it was the best thing that could be done for him, and would prove in the end the least expensive, though slightly more tedious, mode of securing his seat.

He could not afford to fight it out with Cook as an action of counter-bribery, and if the latter were warned beforehand and tempted to play fair, he might still, with the aid and influence of Kenyon, succeed in beating

Jemmy. But if, emboldened by previous impunity, and wishing to make sure of a majority while he was about it, the Liberal should fall back upon his old game and his long purs., Jemmy was prepared to let him do his dirtiest, then, when the poll had been declared against himself, to lodge his appeal and his thousand pounds with all promptitude and secure his own return without farther hesitation.

Ralph, who longed to see the Liberals sink their money and then growl over their burnt fingers, had carefully instilled these tactics into Jemmy, and the latter, though of course losing no legitimate chances to obtain his own return, if by any possible chance, the first time of asking, had acquiesced in this policy, and was cautiously setting his spies and biding his time.

A reassuring document from his principal agent, which was awaiting his arrival at the Maule, backed up with a carefully-cooked dinner and an unexceptionable bottle of Madeira, put him on pleasanter terms with affairs in general, while the female population went aloft to prepare for action and get into harness.

Ralph had gone to spend the day with Ruby in Oxford, and to make himself useful in coaching a very raw university eight down the "long course," and to improve the occasion by testing the schooling of the four-year-old filly, bought some time back at Besselsleigh, over the timber obstacles that abound down that stretch of water-meadows.

So Mr. Blake sat alone over the dining-room fire, and did his best to prevent waste of the Madeira, till the door opened, and Georgie, who had got a start of the rest by

adorning her *chevelure* in advance before they sat down to dinner, stole in to keep company with the recluse, got up in plain white tulle, looped with green wreaths, of which Jemmy made a careful mental note on the spot.

"Where's your mask, child?" and Georgie produced a deep crape bandage, with holes let in for vision and respiration, and indented at each entrance where it passed round the side of the head with a silver spray; and putting it up to her face she grinned at him through it.

"You look like a little smut-faced bogey. I should not have known you again, unless by your necklace."

"You wouldn't know that; I never wore it before. Papa brought it me from Hungary the other day. I have put it on on purpose that no one may recognise me by anything they have seen before, and this bracelet to match it is new to you;" and she produced her left arm for inspection.

"I don't see how any amount of masking will ever cover a crop of hair like Fanny Waldron's," quoth Jemmy sardonically; "anyone must know who she is."

"When she sets the town on fire the moment she enters it," suggested Georgie. "You had better dip your whiskers in the milk," she added maliciously, "and there will be no fear of anyone making you out."

"I think the whole thing great foolery," grunted Jemmy.

"It's a change, and it's sure to be fun; there will be such lots of mistakes, people trying to guess who's who I am rather looking forward to it."

"Are you?" he again grunted, arguing that as the fun consisted in meeting people who would not recognise her,

the attraction did not include himself, to whom she had already pointed out all her peculiarities of array ; and he consoled himself with a fresh glass of Madeira instead of making any further remark.

"It's very good of you, Jemmy, to come all this way to escort us when you dislike dancing so much," presently put in Georgie, when she found Jemmy too indolent to push the conversation on his own account.

"Somebody must look after you children, or you would be getting into all sorts of mischief."

"I gave you credit that your coming was due to your own especial good-nature, not on account of your holding such a low opinion of us 'children,' as you call us. I hope you will find something to amuse you, even if you do think dancing such folly."

"I shall have plenty to do—I don't know about amusement—in making out who's who by their manners, and who they come with," said Jemmy, curtly.

"If you don't know who's who, how can you tell who they are dancing with, or who is dancing with them?" interrogated Georgie.

"I shall know quite enough," grunted Jemmy, finishing his bottle, and concealing his confusion at having so nearly betrayed his tactics, as he ducked his mouth in his glass, and sipped and pondered over the flavour of the last of the Madeira ; and as he set down his glass, the two Romilly girls entered in full panoply, having unsuccessfully drawn the drawing-room and library in search of Georgie ; and Jemmy, regretting that it would not do to savour of nicotiana for the benefit of future partners, proceeded to fortify and attire himself for the box-seat of

the brougham, without the solace of a weed to light him on his way.

So, after a nine-mile drive, they found themselves in the entrance-hall of Weldover; and presented the pass-tickets, which had been sent to each guest to qualify admission, and prevent the presence, in disguise, of uninvited intruders, and also to dispense with the betrayal of identity, which would have resulted from sending and announcing names publicly in the reception-rooms.

Since physiognomies were veiled, the only preference in the selection of a partner could exist from criterion of dress and figure. Though simple enough in the former item, the juniors of the Maule party had good claim for notice on the latter score; and inasmuch as there was, moreover, a proper equipoise of partners on both sides, neither they nor others had any special excuse for playing wall-flower.

The difficulty of identification prevented any extent of preëngagements, and partners were principally selected from dance to dance as required.

Jemmy made no secret of his identity when he led Georgie out for two sets of Lancers in succession, and was far more cordial and colloquial during those operations than he had been previously in the Maule dining-room.

Meanwhile there were others who, though they were enjoying the ball in the abstract, and were content to amuse themselves with their own incognitos, were by no means completely satisfied with the incognito of others.

Clara Vane had for a long time attempted to decipher among multitudinous masks something that could be

identified as exclusive to the M.F.H. of the Old Vale. She half-fancied that he might recognise her by an enamel bracelet which she had worn on New-year's Eve at the Vale House, and had made him fasten for her when the spring had slipped. What a pity it was that she had not made him admire it more at the time, and so drawn his attention to it ! But whoever thought at that time that Lady Kenilworth would indulge in such a freak as this !

And Clara anathematised her ill-luck just as a mask came up, and pleaded for the next set of Lancers.

"Not unlike Jemmy Blake !" was her comment to herself ; "about the right height ; and just like him to prefer Lancers to a round dance ;" and Clara turned the enamel portrait of the bracelet conspicuously, as she took her partner's arm and prepared to go into action.

"And a fox's head upon his watch-chain !" was her next observation, when her neighbour, who showed that he evidently knew with whom he was dancing, whispered in an *empresé* manner his happiness in having discovered his partner in time for this dance (the one preceding supper).

"I am not sure whether I ever noticed him wear one before, but it's just the sort of thing that a Master of hounds would wear. It must be him ; how delightful !" And Clara, with much *empressement*, murmured her satisfaction at being blessed with such a partner at this critical period of the evening.

"I knew you the moment I came into the room," whispered the mask again presently, while the *vis-à-vis* were doing duty.

"Did you really? Pray tell me how?"

"The instinct of love!" the mask was on the point of whispering; but thinking that perhaps such a sentiment might be a little too abrupt so early in the day, and fearing lest he should scare his partner, who seemed immensely gracious this evening, and should make her draw in her horns, he modified his explanation to, "Where there's a will, there's a way. I made up my mind to recognise you, and so I did."

"How very clever of you! But you have not quite told me how," went on Clara, with all the natural curiosity of a woman, but a little less loquacious than usual under the palpitation which the scene that she considered so closely impending necessarily engendered.

The mask hung fire for an instant, as if in agitation, and Clara continued:

"You say that you knew me the very instant you came into the room, didn't you?" Implying that this was the tenth dance, and the cavalier had, to say the least, been slack in not coming forward sooner, if he knew with whom he was dealing.

"Yes; I only came in ten minutes ago. I have been delayed all day by this electioneering and canvass. I did not get any dinner till nine o'clock; so I followed the girls in my dog-cart as soon as I could."

"Electioneering and canvass! that settles the thing. I knew I couldn't be wrong!" thought Clara; who, by-the-bye, was a distant relation of old Kenyon, who had no residence in the county, though, on his prestige as a Cabinet Minister and member of Privy Council, he had so many years unmolested represented it. "I am sure



I wish you all success in the contest," said Clara affectionately ; "even though one's own relations may be engaged in it at the same time, one cannot help feeling the deepest sympathy for one's friends also."

"Relations engaged in contest, hey ! that's all safe, then," cogitated the mask. "I was not quite sure about the voice at first, though the dress is the right one. How good of her to keep to the same colours ! Must have done it on purpose to lead me. Bless her !" and his clasp of recognition in the next double ladies'-chain bore an unmistakable meaning.

"But you haven't yet told me how you recognised me," put in Clara when they came to an anchor after the figure, and her curiosity was still paramount.

"You should not wear the same articles at two consecutive balls," whispered the mask slyly.

"How fortunate that I thought of this in time !" thought Clara, as she again adjusted the bracelet. "And you really knew me by that, did you ?" she continued.

"Of course I did ; those sort of things make an impression on me when they are connected with those I—take an interest in," concluded the mask, again restraining himself, and modifying his sentiments till a more convenient opportunity.

"He's getting on," thought Clara ; "I was afraid he was becoming quite dull the other night at his own house ; but I suppose he was worried then with the responsibilities of the evening ;" and she turned her eyes with an expressive and studied flash right into those of her partner, as she said :

"So you take an interest in what I wear? I am exceedingly flattered, Sir. I did not know you were a man of taste, or I would have consulted your opinion often before this," she continued in a bantering tone.

"Of course I take an interest in what you wear, if I take an interest in yourself," said the mask tenderly.

"In me?" said Clara, looking down demurely.

It was no use to blush under thick crape, but attitude and expression could do a good deal without that.

"And don't you take interest in *me*?" continued the other, improving the occasion, as they stood in a window recess, for the set had been concluded a minute or two ago.

Clara still looked demure, and made no reply. More was sure to come, if she only tried cautiously to draw it out in the right place.

"I thought you took interest and sympathised with me in my contest just now. Do you not?" continued the mask, perseveringly and coaxingly, as he peered down and tried to catch the eyes below him.

"Oh, yes; I am sure I wish you success with all my heart," said Clara guardedly; for there was no longer any need to make running for herself, since her partner had suddenly taken it up so strenuously on his own account.

"They are going in to supper; shall we go on there?" suggested the mask, who noticed that another cavalier was eyeing them with a sinister demeanour from an opposite window, and dreaded lest the spectator of their *tête-à-tête* should prove to be Jemmy Blake.

So the pair led off boldly to supper, and did ample

justice to his lordship's champagne ; while the dramatic-looking mask, following from the other window, grumbled to himself,

"Who the deuce can the rascal be? I twigged her dress half an hour ago. It looks horrid like as if he had done so too. They were too earnest not to know who they were talking to. Just my luck! If I had only gone to the Rectory one day sooner, I might have had it all my own way. I'll have a cut in on my own hook before the night's out, or I'm a——"

And the gentleman concluded his soliloquy in a bumper of Epernay, and, thus fortified, returned to the ball-room in search for some dame to whom to do the dutiful.

"We must not make ourselves conspicuous by dancing too many dances running," said the mask cautiously towards the end of supper. "I know someone who looked very cross at us when we sat out together in Vale House a month ago. Let me put myself down for this and this," he continued, selecting a valse and galop at judicious intervals down the later part of the card ; which Clara, of course, graciously surrendered at his bidding.

Mr. James Blake had meantime had a more pleasant time of it than he had anticipated over his Madeira. He had, in the short interval, danced thrice with Georgie, since there could be no notice taken of the proceeding, and had so far risked the enjoyment of his supper as to let two of his dances with her be spinning ones. When disengaged from her, he had thrown himself *con amore* into the hands of other partners, and done his duty man-

fully, apparently relishing the reaction occasioned to his usually retiring nature by indulging for the nonce in wholesale flirtation, because free from the risk of detection.

And not the less had Georgie enjoyed herself, not only in Jemmy's society, but even when fettered to others, from the fact that she soon recognised at a distance the piracy that Clara Vale had told her of; to wit, the dove-silk and spangled tulle, which had so occupied Jack Marshall in the study on New-year's Eve, in picking up and cherishing as relics the oft-falling spangles that littered the ground round the settee whither he had then in his exuberance drawn Miss Warren for a *tête-à-tête*. Jack Marshall had preserved a pocketful of these spangles, and a stray dove-coloured bow to boot, and was not likely to forget the details of that dress for some time to come. And Georgie, observing the dove-silk and spangles keeping head-quarters at the farther end of the room, was gratified at last to find that the wearer thereof, who for an hour or two had seemed ill at ease, closely scanning everyone that she passed, and peering inquisitively into Jemmy's face as he checked for breath in a gallop with Georgie on his arm, seemed just before supper to have settled down to a partner after her own heart, with whom she was soon deep in earnest converse, and after standing out a following dance with the same mask, had gone under his convoy to the supper-room.

It was towards the close of the evening, when the dove-silk and spangled tulle had been for the last two hours see-sawing principally between the partnership of the mask who had convoyed her to supper, and of

another who had hung most assiduously upon her skirts the whole evening, but who, from his height, slight frame, and delicately-shaped hands, was certainly not Mr. James Blake. But the two masks in question had both, for prudential or other reasons, left the lady disengaged for the last dance but two ; and then, by coincidence, seemed each to imagine that he had waited off long enough, and might be justified in pleading for one more turn before the finale.

Clara Vane was standing in the doorway, and trying to decipher, if possible, which, among a flood that had just gone out to parade and cool on the balcony, might be Georgie Warren, when the two masked cavaliers came up simultaneously, one on each side, and craved the next dance as a last *bonne bouche*.

There was no help for it but to make an invidious distinction. Neither gentleman had heard nor noticed the other till he had spoken, and so was too late to forearm himself with a white lie that the lady was already engaged to him ; each had acknowledged by his request that it was still an open question between them.

So Clara looked in perplexity from one to the other, in hopes that one might resign or offer to postpone his request to the following dance. No such luck. Each repeated his request, and more earnestly than before ; a choice must be made ; who knew but that it might be a more final one than the externals of the case might suggest ?

The dangling fox's head denominated plainly him to whom she must confide herself.

No longer did she hesitate, and, making a graceful

bow to the other suitor, she softly said that the other gentleman had, she believed, preëngaged her ; and then, resigning herself to her squire, who was in ecstasies at this ready result of the dove-silk's unblushing mendacity, she sailed off with him.

"How good of you to devote yourself to me again!" whispered the mask when they got into a corner presently after the dance ; and he began to think that the decided preference exhibited for himself in this choice and sundry other items warranted him in coming to the point, and getting a load off his mind, before they should separate for the evening. "I was afraid you would have had so much of my company that you would have been glad to change me for the other gentleman, whoever he was," he continued, seeking by self-disparagement to elicit some coaxing compliment that should encourage him, and facilitate his progress.

"Why should you think that I should have too much of you?" was the reply.

"Haven't you? Then will you tell me that you are not bored with me after all?"

"How could I be?" Of course the eyelids drooped slyly and judiciously as the mask looked up into them, the better to read his fate.

"But this is only one evening, once and away. Suppose you were to see as much of me every day; are you sure that you would not think me then too much of a good thing?"

"I hope not," said Clara, with a careful modulation of her voice, wishing that he would not beat so long about the bush.

"You gave yourself out just now as preëngaged to me before everyone else," said the mask, with his heart in his mouth, but thinking that it must be now or never. "Will you, or won't you—I mean to say, have you any objection to making that a more permanent engagement, and giving me the right to claim you before everyone else, everywhere, and anywhere?" and he paused, breathless, for reply, as he congratulated himself that the end brought the murder to the surface in a decidedly artistic manner.

"Oh, you don't know what you are saying," faltered Clara, who of course knew well enough, but could not afford to take him at his word too rapidly.

"I know surely what I am saying, when it has been on my mind night and day for months! You won't deny me, will you, dearest?"

"No," murmured Clara, who thought that he was not sufficiently explicit.

"And may I tell her ladyship, since you are her guest, what we have arranged, so that I may come and see you again before you leave the county; or had I better write to your father at once?"

"Oh no," said Clara, who did not see the use of making Lady Marshall her confidante, and felt herself best able to deal with her papa herself; but at the same time puzzled that Jemmy, who had been on such easy footing at Ashton Grove, should want leave or excuse for calling there to see her or anyone, till she explained his novel diffidence as the natural timidity of affection, or else to some misunderstanding on election scores with Jack Marshall; so she continued, "I will see papa my-

self, and talk about it with him ; I am sure he will have no objection ; and you can write to him as soon as I am gone home, for, I am sorry to say, I go back to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" ejaculated the mask in disappointment ; "so soon?"

"You must come and see us in town as soon as the election is over. Papa has just taken a house in Lowndes-square, and we go into it as soon as I go back to keep house for him. No. 17 is the house."

"And I am to write to him there as soon as you get home—say the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, that will be best," replied Clara, who had quickly recovered her equanimity, and was fully alive to business.

"Thank you, dearest ; a thousand thanks !" whispered the gentleman in his most tender modulation, and manipulating in his own the fingers of the hand upon his arm.

"Gently ! please take care ; people will be looking at us. You had better put me down before they begin to take notice or suspect. That must be Lady Marshall who is coming towards us now."

"I'll get my dogcart, and be off out of the way at once before the rest," said the lover, in prompt obedience ; and with one more tenderly-whispered adieu he placed her upon a seat, and left the room, snapping his fingers and chuckling like a daw, while Clara shook out her dress complacently, settled herself down, and watched the retiring cavalier, with the consciousness that she had played her cards remarkably well, and landed a very good stroke of business.



“We shall have plenty of room inside,” quoth Lady Marshall, as she settled her band in the recesses of the huge covered wagonette that had brought the Ashton-Grove party; “Jack has confined himself, I see, to his dogcart, that he might be independent.”

“How curious!” said Clara; “just the same as Mr. Blake. I suppose these election candidates have so much on their hands, that they are obliged to have their times and actions dependent on no one but themselves;” and she settled herself back in her bernous, and enjoyed delicious reveries till they pulled up at the Grove door.





## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### A CRITICAL STATE OF THE POLL.

**T** was a full cargo that went into Ashton from the Vale House on the 25th in the Maule carriage; for Jemmy, though he had set up a sort of tea-cart phaeton in addition to his dogcart, had not gone the length of any more luxurious conveyance so long as his only female guests were Lady Mary and his young friends, who invariably brought the britzska with them for general use.

There were Lady Mary, Georgie, Ralph Romilly, and Jemmy himself inside—Ruby beaming from the box-seat—as they picked their way slowly through the crowded streets between banners, colours, rosettes, placards stationary and placards peripatetic, roughs and lambs of all classes and varieties of creed, and cat-calls, cheers, groans, hisses, and the usual varieties of ebullition and expression of feeling on the part of the British populace, till they reached the doorway of the Golden Cross, the headquarters of the committee of the Conservative candidate.

The nomination had taken place in Ashton three days previously ; and of course each candidate had his nominal duty of addressing the electors and outsiders who thronged the hustings.

And equally as a matter of course, not a word was heard by any of the audience below, or even of those close around and alongside, except the one or two close at elbow, and the local reporters, who picked up what they could at the time, and filled up deficiencies afterwards by reference to the manuscript copy of each candidate's address, which was placed at their service.

Jack Marshall, unprepared for such turmoil and lack of order, had diligently learnt off his oration by heart, with studious attention to effect, punctuation, pronunciation, and modulation, and was disappointed at the undeserved disregard with which his efforts and arguments were received ; and still farther annoyed when a decidedly unclean dead cat, hurled by a "lamb" in his own employ — whose ignorance or temporarily obfuscated brain caused him to mistake his employer for Mr. Blake — struck him full on the mouth, and lent a decided distaste to the utterance of the remainder of his speech.

On the whole, however, the mob was fairly orderly. The above unintentional insult—which, as explained, was purely accidental, at least so far as the individual on whom the visitation lighted—was the only one committed upon any of the candidates. Two only, of the many fights and suchlike disagreements that enlivened the streets, led to coroners' inquests.

As before said, audience was a mere farce, and the mob about as decided and discriminative as that which

in centuries past yelled for the space of three hours in honour of Diana of the Ephesians : but they seemed, on the whole, to appreciate Mr. Blake more than anyone, unless it were the veteran Kenyon ; and what with cheering of his own friends and the matter-of-course hooting of the opposition, Mr. Blake had more difficulty in obtaining an audience, even for the benefit of reporters close at his elbow, than had any other of the patient and long-suffering candidates.

Of the organised pledges and promises promulgated by each candidate in his nominal endeavour to convince the mass of electors, who had been canvassed, courted, pledged, bought, and sold one way or another, days and weeks before, *vide* daily papers of the period, local and metropolitan.

The next day but one had seen the commencement of the poll, at seven or eight-polling-places throughout the county ; and at the close of that day it was pretty palpable that Jack Marshall was, so to speak, "out of it."

The figures, balanced as nearly as could be from the returns of the various committees, were on the morning in question—Kenyon, 4872 ; Cook, 3017 ; Blake, 3003 ; and Marshall, 940.

The friends of the second Liberal, who was evidently having a closer run with Mr. Blake than his party relished, pressed Jack Marshall to retire, and so save to Cook what votes would otherwise have gone to his hopeless cause. But Jack stuck manfully to his colours, declared that the contest wasn't half over yet, and that the Ashton district had reserved itself for the second day,

and that then the public would see wherein his great strength lay.

So, as might be supposed, J. Marshall junior, being at loggerheads with committees and interests in the town, was not one of the most popular characters that showed in the highways of Ashton that day; and for one dead cat of the preceding day, no less than ten fell into the carriage on the morrow, as he drove in state to his quarters at the Bull and Mouth.

Of Mr. Blake's 3000 odd votes about two-thirds were as might be supposed, "plumpers." The residue had been split between him and Kenyon, whom discriminating politicians esteemed Conservative in heart, Liberal only in name.

"Jack Marshall sticks to his colours, and won't scratch," said Ralph, as he came with the latest news to Jemmy and the ladies on the balcony of the Golden Cross.

"Pig-headed booby!" quoth Jemmy, who wasted no love upon his opponent; "what chance on earth can he expect to have?"

"Don't slang the poor brute; he is doing you, though he doesn't mean it, the very best turn that he can. Every vote that he draws is one off Cook's score, for all the Yellows split between Kenyon and one of the other two Liberals."

"We shall beat friend Cook without his help," said Jemmy sardonically, with the remembrance of a letter received not forty-eight hours before from his agent, and the secret intelligence and evidence therein contained.

"There he goes!" said Ruby, as Jack Marshall, in an Ashton-Grove open carriage, drove slowly by underneath

the balcony, and looked up at the group assembled there.

Jack was by no means in the best of humours. The same post that had brought to Mr. Blake the pleasing news of the results of his agent's espionage upon the dealings of Mr. Cook with venal constituents had also delivered to him, from the Dead-Letter Office, his own documents addressed respectively to Colonel and Miss Warren, 17 Lowndes-square, returned with the explanation "Not known here," and having no doubt afforded, from their several contents, infinite amusement to the intelligent and gossiping clerks of that Civil-Service department.

The first object, and perhaps the only one, that attracted Jack's eye as he gazed up was the *sans-souci* face of Georgie bending over Ruby's shoulder, and watching the hurly-burly below.

"Down here, after all!" was Jack's mental ejaculation. "That explains it all. House wasn't ready; stopped on at the Maule; too shy to write and tell me all about it. Must be that. Very strange, though. She wasn't half so shy the other night."

And shelving politics and party-spirit in an instant, he doffed his beaver and bowed gracefully to the group overhead.

The stretch of courtesy nearly proved fatal to him; for the balance of a brickbat, which had struck a lamp-post—sending the best proportion through the unshuttered front of a chemist's shop, to the detriment of drugs and vials—glanced on to Jack's unprotected pate, and, leaving its mark in an unmistakable manner, caused the re-

cient to collapse half-stunned on the cushions behind him.

His friend and agent, Mr. John Moore, promptly raised the wounded man, while the "lambs" clustered round the carriage in penitence that one of their number should have inadvertently expended upon his master a missile which had been honestly intended for a true-blue voter at that moment escorted down to the polling-booth.

Lady Mary noted the handkerchief saturated with blood which the agent was holding to the broken pate of the Radical candidate, and called Jemmy's attention to the catastrophe. All Mr. Blake's spleen and dislike vanished at the sight of what appeared to be a really serious accident, and before the coachman had received his orders from the agent not to proceed to the Bull and Mouth, which was a quarter of a mile distant, but to turn back sharp to the doctor's, Jemmy and Ralph had pushed their way through the crowd to the carriage,—the latter finding it needful to trample a couple of "lambs" under foot in his progress, —and between them lifted out the half-stupid Jack and carried him unceremoniously into the anteroom at the back of the luncheon-room. The flow of blood and a glass of cold water soon brought Jack to himself again, and long before the doctor had made his appearance Lady Mary had cut away the hair round the gash, and nearly stanchd the bleeding by judicious application of wet cloths; Georgie standing by, and making herself useful according to orders given.

The doctor would have at once removed his patient out of the enemy's quarters, but Jack, who had already

got his eyes and wits about him, saw Georgie Warren, and was "too shaken" to move just yet, and pleaded hard to be allowed to stay where he was.

And as Jemmy Blake, let alone his innate charity, was well content that the Radical should stay where he was, and have no opportunity for authorising as yet the withdrawal of his name from the contest, and thus swelling the poll for Mr. Cook, Jack Marshall was suffered to have his way, and stay where he found himself.

Meanwhile Ruby and Ralph had, *inter alia*, fallen into discussion of the bogus address that had given so much offence to Jack and amusement to Sir John Marshall.

"I wish I had been there to see Master Jack fire up," said Ralph; "Jemmy told me the story in his own way, and it was as good as a play. It's the best draw we have had this election, which has, on the whole, been a very slow one; I never knew one with less incident till Jack, here, got his head broken just now at the finish for a variety."

"And you say that Jemmy did not write the address, nor you, and no one has any idea who sent it in?" asked Ruby.

"Not a trace of any sort; the only clue I know would be to call at the *Times* office, and see if we could identify the handwriting: I understand that Jack did so, but could not make head or tail of it."

"But we don't want to unearth the author, do we?" suggested Ruby.

"Not to do him an injury or expose him, unless he is proud of the joke—as I think I should be; but we might see if we can make anything of it for our own



curiosity. I suspected Algy Paget at one time, but Jemmy swears that he had nothing to do with it. We'll call at Printing-house-square next time we go to town."

"We needn't go so far as that."

"Why not?" said Ralph.

"The *Ashton Mercury* published it as well as the *Times*."

"Are you sure? How do you know? You don't take it in at Vincent's?" said Ralph, looking at Ruby.

"I heard that it came out in that, though; I am sure it did. Let's go and see if the editor has kept the manuscripts."

"Come on, then, and we can see the latest returns at the same time;" and tucking the young one under his arm, Ralph convoyed him through the mob and down a bye-street to the office of the *Ashton Mercury*.

Picking their way into the printing-room, where overworked compositors and devils were busily setting-up the hourly notices and returns of the committees, they accosted the local editor in his box poring over a proof-sheet, and announcing themselves as joint friends of Mr. Blake and Sir John Marshall, explained the reason of their coming.

"A good many gentlemen have asked to see the same thing," said the editor; "but none of them have been able to make anything of the writing. It's not a very peculiar hand, after all, but it's an unformed one; more like a schoolgirl's, I should say, than anything else," he concluded, as he fished out two sheets of notepaper, thick cream-laid, but bearing no die or monogram of any sort whatever, and laid them before them, while Ralph

glanced instantaneously at Ruby, who was quietly and innocently studying the sheet in front of him, and then in his turn carefully read the paper through. "Thank you, Mr. Owen," was all he said when he had concluded.

"I am afraid I do not see my way to give you any information any more than those who have gone before me."

"It's by no means a bad hoax, Sir," said the editor. "It's quite took me in, as you may see, for I did not know Mr. Marshall's handwriting; and as far as the style and manner of it, I could see nothing unnatural in it, though I have no doubt he would not be at all flattered to hear me say so. I wonder the writer does not let out the authorship now that it is all over, if only for the fun of the thing."

"I suppose it depends whether it suits him and his friends to have a split with Mr. Marshall," said Ruby.—"Come on, Ralph;" and they wished the editor good-day.

"I think I have seen that handwriting before," said Ralph, as they turned back into the High-street.

"So have I, I think," said Ruby demurely; and Ralph stopped and looked him in the face, whereupon Ruby stopped too, and both burst out laughing.

"Come on: we must not talk too loud about it here, you young sinner. I didn't think you up to such a trick. What on earth put it into your head, and how did you know in time?"

"Marriott had been dining and sleeping at Ashton Grove, and came back early that day with the news; so I bought a quire of plain paper, and sent the thing up

the same night as a special parcel by the 9.15 train, with a special delivery, so as to get it in town in time for press that night."

"Have you told Jemmy?"

"Wait till the election is over, and the thing has dropped, so that he may say meantime, if asked, that he knows nothing of it or the author. Georgie is the only person that knows a word about it, bar you;" and they reëntered the Golden Cross.

Jack Marshall was sitting up in an armchair, a towel twisted round his head, his agent deep in converse with him; Georgie and Lady Mary devoting themselves to Jemmy in the next room, so as not to play the spy upon the political converse of the Opposition in the anteroom; and to judge by the expression of the Radical candidate's face, he had abandoned all care for the coming election, and would have infinitely preferred his agent's room to his company.

"The poll has closed here for the day," said Ralph, entering again a couple of hours later. "You've a majority of forty over Cook in this place so far."

"Not enough, I fear, to compensate for his preponderance in his own peculiar district. He will make up all that and more in the total;" and Jemmy ordered the carriage to return to the Vale House.

Lady Mary was alone in the Vale House library next afternoon, when Jack Marshall was ushered in.

Beyond a black bandage round his head he seemed but little the worse for wear; but his manner was frightfully *distrained* and tame as he looked round the room, as if for other faces, and proceeded to utter his thanks for

the shelter and doctoring that had been afforded him the day before.

"Jemmy and the others have gone in for the declaration of the poll," said Lady Mary, noticing his enquiring glances.

"I did not see Miss Warren and Ruby," said Jack doubtfully. "Mr. Romilly and Mr. Blake were alone in the phaeton."

"Ruby rode a whip's horse over, so as to be independent, and to bring back the news sooner. Georgie left this morning."

"Left!" said Jack breathlessly. "For the Maule, I suppose?" he added, gasping for a reprieve.

"No; I am sorry to say she has left us for Brighton, to join Colonel Warren."

And Jack's face fell almost to his shoes. Just his luck again.

Lady Mary noticed his state of mind, and easily divined his case. "I don't think Georgie has any idea of it," thought she; so she kept her own counsel.

Ruby came into the room with his hat on, cracking a dog-whip.

"No go this journey," he said; "we must beat them on appeal."

"Dear me! what is the result?" asked Lady Mary curiously.

Ruby fished out an old envelope, and read figures from the back of it—"Kenyon, 8640; Cook, 5937; Jemmy, 5782.—I didn't take down your score," said he innocently to Jack, "because you know you weren't in the hunt after the start."

Jack Marshall rose to go ; he could not be persuaded to stay for lunch ; he had an engagement ; and he barely shook hands with Ruby as the latter escorted him to his dogcart.

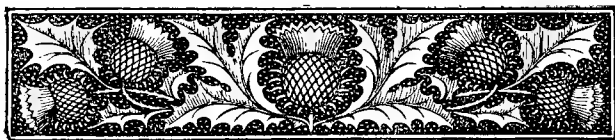
“What brought him here, mother ?” said he as he came back to the library.

“He came to return thanks for our taking care of him yesterday,” said Lady Mary, who did not feel quite justified in betraying the result of her own observation to Ruby.

“That all ?” said Ruby. “No thanks wanted for that ; it paid best to keep him safe in there, and prevent him from being persuaded to scratch. Worse luck, Cook’s ahead, after all !” and he went to look for some lunch.

But Mr. Blake’s appeal and thousand pounds’ security were duly lodged at Westminster before the new House had been a week in conclave.





## CHAPTER XXIX.

### AINTREE.

**T**HE numbers are going up for the Grand National at Liverpool; twenty-three competitors have sported silk and weighed in; top weight but one stands the five-year-old Lord of the Valley; Ralph Romilly is to ride him this time. In point of jockeyship he can probably give Ruby Blake five pounds; but there is no jealousy between the cousins. Ruby rode and won the Croydon Cup at a weight to which Ralph could not scale. Now, the latter can within a short period waste to the required eleven twelve, and Ruby, with Jemmy Blake's sanction, has at once vacated in his favour. Lady Mary, moreover, had a voice in the matter, and, though unwilling to dictate or tie Ruby to apron-strings, pleaded against Ruby incurring the rush and risk of a crowd of two-dozen horses at the racing pace of the great Aintree event.

So Ralph is installed in the pigskin, and Peter Mell, to

his disgust, rides Tomfool. Mr. Blake, as a matter of course, has declared to win with Lord of the Valley.

Here come the competitors from the paddock, in single file. That iron gray is Billygoat, who has been judiciously roped all the season with a view to this race. He carries ten stone eight; his owner is a well-known peer, whose reputation, whether social or sporting, will not improve upon scrutiny. Mr. James, the "professional" gentleman jockey, rides him, and has been put on a "monkey" to half-a-crown from his noble patron. Billygoat ran nowhere to Tomfool at about even weights when the latter won the Grand Handicap at Croydon; but the secret has pretty well oozed out that the "Goat was not meant that journey, and few now would care to back Tomfool against him in a match at even weights, still less now that he receives ten pounds from his old opponent. In public form Billygoat has no such rosy chance after all; but previous running counts for nothing when the appointed time has come, and "money makes the horse (or mare) to go." The outlays upon the Goat have made him first favourite, eclipsing even the public predilection for Lord of the Valley; and all the sporting prophets in the newspapers have included Billygoat *par excellence* in their selections of the six favourites "to win and for a place."

"Here comes Bayonet (ten stone thirteen), late a flat-racer of merit, a powerful horse, who had finally lost his best dash of speed on the turf, and so was "schooled" by his owner to do new duty over a country. He carries tens of thousands for a certain "clever" division, who have already squared two other animals with fair chances, but in the same interest, and which are therefore scratched

at the last moment, to the lamentation of such of the confiding public who have sunk capital upon them.

Meteor, the winner of last year, comes past next, burdened with one pound less than Lord of the Valley—an honest but slight-framed horse, who will do his best to the last. Meyerbeer, perhaps the premier steeplechaser in the world, unless this forthcoming race shall betray a champion to eclipse him, follows, glorying under twelve stone ten, the top-weight of the card—a deep-girthed, long-striding, slashing thoroughbred. He seems to make mere child's-play of his welter-weight as he canters past; but there is a limit at the end of four miles and a quarter to the endurance even of a Meyerbeer.

There is Buttercup, perhaps the most perfect fencer in the field, not quite thoroughbred, a picture of beauty, but better suited to a "cramped" country, with a stiff stake-and-bound every two hundred yards, than a racing course like the Aintree "country," with only two dozen fences and two of those hurdle-flights in four miles and a quarter. His weight, eleven stone, is not enough to stop him; but the pace will be too much for him to live with it all the way twice round.

Tomfool we have met before.

Charity Boy, the good thing who was so ruthlessly upset by the former at Croydon, is having another essay, a *bonâ-fide* one, for his owner has a high opinion of his chance under ten stone nine.

Lord of the Valley, the public idol, comes nearly last, behind a ruck of nondescripts, who will play no important part in the coming race. His lordship is on excellent terms with himself, and his coat and condition do infinite



credit to the skill and patience of Peter Mell. Truly the trainer has made him as he vowed—a stone-better horse, including growth and development, than when he won the Croydon Cup in December.

Now they come down the racecourse in single-file canter, and take the lower hurdles by way of practice, and then the medley of colours streams off to the starting-post.

Tomfool making the running as usual; three horses have refused the first fence, and another stops short at the second obstacle. No one ever knew Mary Ann refuse before; but the tone of the market for the last twenty-four hours, when she receded from twelve to one, taken freely, to thirty-three to one offered, was very ominous to her backers who stood her on the strength of her having run second last year with the same weight that she now carries, a year older; but her owner, a “clever” man, at the eleventh hour has changed his tactics, and stands in the same swim with Bayonet; he had hardly the courage in cold blood to scratch her, but she is just as safe as if the pen had gone through her name, and she will “see a better day” before long.

There is a palpable tail even now, at the end of a mile and a half. Beecher’s and Valentine’s Brooks have weeded-off six or seven aspirants; a broken leg and a ricked back will find employment for the knackers; but Tomfool still leads all a merry dance as they come along canal-side into the corner of the racecourse, and then reënter the “country” of market-gardens for the second round. Meteor is going second; Billygoat is running well up to his bit, and “Mr.” James is handling him in a

masterly manner. Lord Peronett watches them through his glasses, and thinks that he will about land his carefully-planned *coup* this time. Lord of the Valley and Bayonet come side by side over the water, and the public can see that their favourite is on excellent terms with his weight and his adversaries. Twelve ten has not yet stopped Meyerbeer, though the plough is deep and holding from last night's deluge, and such heavy going must tell a tale upon welter-weights before they reach the racecourse. Meteor is close with him, and Charity-boy, close handy, is pulling double as they charge Beecher's Brook the second time ; and pace is becoming too much of a good thing for Buttercup, who would prefer a close country at Cardiff or Caermarthen.

Along the canal-side once more, and Tomfool has done his duty ; he gradually comes back beaten to his followers, and Bayonet and Billygoat rush to the front ; Lord of the Valley at their girths ; Meteors falling away under the improving pace ; Charity-boy closing up, and Meyerbeer sticking well to him.

Bayonet and Billygoat are neck-and-neck as they jump into the racecourse, and Lord of the Valley takes hold of his bit and closes gallantly with them as they settle down for a last half-mile of little better than flat-racing. Charity-boy and Meyerbeer cannot quite make up leeway, but if anything happens to the leaders they are close handy at their heels.

Bayonet's flat-racing powers ought to serve him now, think the "clever" division ; Billygoat's weight is all in his favour ; Lord of the Valley comes on at their girths, but they have already stolen half a length from him, and

Ralph is by no means sure that he can make it up again—not yet, anyhow ; he must wait till the last hurdles. Four miles of deep and fast going at twenty-five miles an hour have told a tale, and sifted the powers of his lordship ; he is pretty well told out, though the other two are about as far gone as he is ; but it is asking a five-year-old a great thing to give away his year and a stone weight to boot to two such animals as Bayonet and Billygoat.

As they charge the first flight of hurdles, Billygoat pecks the top of them in distress, stumbles on landing, and in an instant has lost two irretrievable lengths. Lord of the Valley's stride covers a dozen feet on each side of the fence, and puts him once more all but head-and-head with Bayonet. He cannot improve his position as they come down the straight, nor can the flat-racer get away an inch from him, and spurs are clinking ruthlessly on each side as they come stride-and-stride at a wearied and rapidly reducing pace, and rise at the last flight of hurdles. Bayonet ought to have the foot of the young one in the last set-to for the run in, but he has not been taught properly to fence when tired ; he chances this last fence, hits it hard all round, and carries it down with him. Lord of the Valley, though pretty well dead-beat, has been better schooled, and he barely brushes the gorse tops as he goes over, and settles down at once a length to the good. Bayonet's jockey, Jack Rosse—the crack professional of the day—pulls his horse together again in a masterly way, and sits down for a tussle ; Ralph takes up his whip for the last effort, and the Lord, as game as a fighting-cock, stretches his neck and flagging limbs to the call upon him, as the whalebone cracks viciously in

time and tune with his stride. He has never been fully "cross-examined" as to his powers till now, and he answers the question to his last breath. Jack Rosse's finish is inimitable, and Bayonet's speed shows what might have been, had he not struck the hurdles; but he cannot get beyond Lord of the Valley's girths. The Grand National is landed by half a length.

Jemmy Blake's face is a picture as he meets Ralph opposite the stand to lead the winner back to the enclosure. The populace cheer for the money they have landed, and the ring are ominously silent. Ruby steals up, and is almost in tears as he sees Lord of the Valley trembling from head to foot; his haunch weal-scarred, and his flanks blood-dripping under the last stress of punishment. Ralph is nearly as much beat as his horse, and reels as he carries his saddle to the scales. He weighed out a pound overweight, but without declaration; he cannot now draw the weight, even with the help of at least a pound of mud and water that is clinging to him. The audience are breathless in that stifling room. The Bayonet clique are not beaten yet.

"Bring Lord of the Valley's snaffle-bridle!" and Ruby himself holds the five-year-old by the forelock, and rubs and soothes the horse's ears, while he trembles with anxiety for the verdict from within. The bridle turns the scale by an ounce.

"All right!" says the clerk of the scales.

"All right!" is echoed out in the enclosure, and through the stand and ring; and the populace cheer again for another ten minutes.

"A near squeak!" says Ralph, as he bites an apple *à la*

Dick Christian, and takes a sip of brandy-and-soda. "I did not think I could waste another two pounds in a quarter of an hour. I fancied I had drawn myself as fine as I well could already."

Ruby comes up to him in the dressing-room, as he gets back into proper attire.

"When did you turn up, young un?" says Ralph. "I looked everywhere for you half-an-hour ago."

"Train was late. I only got on to the stand as you came round the second time. What a splendid finish!" and Ruby sits down upon a saddle-bag, and looks speechless admiration.

Then he continues.

"Did you hear of the mucker last night in the 'Varsity? It's old Harry to pay, you know!"

"What mucker?" says Ralph, as he pitches his silks on to the chair. "Proctors been burnt at Martyrs' Memorial?"

"No such luck! The 'Varsity eight, I mean; did not you get Darrell's telegram?"

"Never heard of one; what's up? Who's sent down?" asks Ralph anxiously.

"Worse than any sending down. Clayton had a dog-cart to meet him at Sandford after steering long course yesterday; he had to dine out somewhere; and Bradshaw had a sore heel, so he had a lift back with him. Bradshaw must needs drive; knows as much about it as a washer-woman. So they came a cropper in Kennington: got the wheel in a drain-hole, and sent Billy Clayton one way and Bradshaw t'other!"

"Well," says Ralph, buttoning his waistcoat.

"Well, Bradshaw's broke his collar-bone, and Billy's leg is in two."

"It's a deuce of a mucker about Bradshaw, but it don't matter about Billy, that I can see; they had better take his legs off, and he'll weigh a couple of stone lighter."

"Don't talk foolery. You'll have to row now."

"I can't. I told Darrell I had given up rowing when we talked it over last term."

"Then you'll let Cambridge walk in; there's not a stroke left in the 'Varsity now that Bradshaw's done for."

"What a common ass the fellow was to meddle with reins!" is all Ralph's reply.

"I've a letter from Darrell, by-the-bye; read it first.—You'll come down at once, won't you?" continues Ruby when Ralph folds up the epistle.

"I am no use. I haven't been in a boat since last college eights, and it's only a month to the race. Can't get fit in that time."

"You're light enough already, in all conscience."

"Yes, but that is mere wasting; my muscle is all about the place. I should have to feed up, instead of down."

"You'll row if I ask you," says Ruby peremptorily.

"Didn't you steer the Eton eight before you ever rowed in it?"

"Yes; two years running."

"Then, if I row, you'll have to steer me."

"Darrell won't have me, I know. Vignels of Wadham is steering to-day."

"They might just as well hire the monkey out of the Botanical Gardens; leave it to me. Darrell doesn't

know that you ever touched rudder-lines ; you are never seen on the river. Who is rowing to-day, vice Bradshaw ? ”

“ Some warming-pan or other—Swindfell, I think. You will row of course ? It would never do for an ex-president to leave the O.U.B.C. in the lurch at a pinch. ”

“ Come on and see Jemmy, ” says Ralph, settling into an overcoat ; “ we ’ ll go up by the next train. ”

“ Two ’ underd to thirty was my account with you, Mr. Bacon, ” says Peter Mell to the Elephant in the betting-ring.

“ It ’ s a bad business, ” says the Elephant manfully, hard hit by the late fiat of the judge. “ You don ’ t belong to Tattersall ’ s, do you ? ”

“ No, ” says Peter.

“ Then we ’ ll meet and settle accounts at the Star to-night. I never does a ready-money business in the ring, as you knows ; ” and the Elephant ’ s book being as good as cash, Peter Mell retires perfectly satisfied.

“ A nigh go, it wur too, by all accounts. Master ’ s no call to go a-risking public money like that ; a puttin ’ up genelmen jocks on the cracks when he ’ s got a purfessional in his own stable ; ” and Mr. Mell, with a high and well-warranted opinion of his own powers in pigskin, feels even the pleasure of robbing the Elephant of two hundred pounds by Lord of the Valley ’ s victory, somewhat tarnished by jealousy at not having ridden the winner himself.

In justice to Mr. Mell, let us make a memorandum that, so soon as he had “ collared the swag ” from his

Croydon successes, he sought out old creditors who had almost forgotten him, and liquidated defaults of eight years' standing, in one case adding a bonus on his own account, where the only representatives of the estate of a once well-to-do bookmaker were a widow and five squalling children.

"You'll have the Leamington chase pretty well at your mercy, even with a penalty," says Lord Sheffield to Jemmy an hour later on the steward's stand. His lordship has gone a "raker" for Lord of the Valley, and is as pleased as Punch with himself and Mr. Blake also.

"My ambition is satisfied. Lord of the Valley shall never sport silk again, for love or money," says Jemmy. "I can't risk tarnished laurels."

And Mr. Blake is a man of his word.







## CHAPTER XXX.

### PUTNEY TO MORTLAKE.



BRIGHT, sunny April morning, glass high, wind S.W., 9 A.M., a long line of pedestrians streaming down the Brompton and Kensington roads, a ceaseless tide of cabs and carriages clattering westward, with a pertinacity creditable to the Derby-day; banners of light blue, banners of dark blue, banners of dubious blue, banners of half-and-half blues, hanging helter-skelter from every pothouse and from a good tithe of the private houses of western thoroughfares; and haberdashery-windows radiant in the display of bonnets, ties, scarfs, rosettes, of the rival hues; streamers fluttering from the head of every nag or moke upon the move, and some distinctive badge of millinery or haberdashery—light or dark blue, according to fancy or sympathy—prominent upon the person of every counter-skipper out for the spree.

Nine-thirty; and Hammersmith Bridge has long been impassable. Carriages have been reduced to a foot-pace

since Turnham Green. Far back into Kensington the block extends, and so on over the bridge up to Barnes and Mortlake, where every available inch of the terrace is already preoccupied by carriages, or a few dummy conveyances waiting to be bought out of their vantage-ground.

Every five minutes or so the London and South-Western Railway disgorges a flush of some hundred sightseers on to Putney or Mortlake platform. Waterloo Bridge has long ago been in a state of siege, and the rush and crush of passengers has swept *en masse* to the ground the two extra ticket-boxes put up on the outside so as to facilitate the distribution ; and great was the fall thereof, and sudden the scramble, and wary the gathering of loose coins by the unscrupulous on the alert.

Ten A.M., and Putney is impassable, unless for a slow and judicious squeeze along the narrow pavement. From over the quaint old timber bridge, and down the High Street with equipages from the country, two sturdy streams of traffic meet at right-angles, and jam and jostle helter-skelter up the narrow alley at the back of Kelley's, past the champion's public-house, the Bells ; drivers are expostulating, horses casually kicking, here and there a stray panel stove in by way of diversion, Jehus blaspheming each other for variety and interlude.

Here come the steamers—confound them!—ploughing down Battersea Reach, kicking up swell enough to sink a decent wherry. There they go, drop their funnels, lie-to off the pier, the well-behaved ones, and the sinners and selfish ones sneak on under the Fulham shore to secure a good start at all hazards, and raise a surf to

experimentalise upon the sea-going capabilities of the *chefs-d'œuvre* of Salter and Searle.

There's the old "Jupiter," as usual, laden to the gunwale, swaying like a porpoise, with a cargo, cheap and nasty, of Whitechapel roughs, who will, of course, keep the race waiting half-an-hour by lying obstinately straight in the track, rather than not have a good start in front of everything else. There's the Trinity-Hall flag, and Logan's; there's the Brasenose steamer, with George West in charge; and an Exeter boat, and Harvey flaunting the O.U.B.C. flag; and the "River Queen" with the Thames Subscription, and the London Rowing Club; and a couple of vicious tugs, kicking up more surf than any other three; and a couple of private boats, and eight or ten more casual cargoes, Citizen this and Iron-boat that.

Ten-fifteen. Time draws nigh. Here's the umpire's boat coming up to the pier, with its placard staring on the bows: this is the sensation cargo of the lot. Country squires, ruddy and fresh; London barristers, grizzled and stern; sturdy parsons, jovial and hearty, grand specimens of muscular Christianity; the thranitai of the past, the champions of olden days, greeting heartily all round, fighting old battles over again on this their day of days, or anxiously listening to the latest news of the practice and training of their pets, their representatives from the modern generation.

Look at that tall, sloping-shouldered, brown-bearded thranite. Few record his name with full justice, for an equally great light was contemporary with him for much of his time, and had a year's seniority to eclipse him;

but he was the finest oar of his time on either river—perfect form, untiring reach, thorough science in all his plans and actions. Though more than a decade has passed since he led the way past the Ship, yet put him even now in an outrigger, he will sit up and show swing and finish that would make him a goodly fugleman for the present generation to follow.

There are a couple of No. 5's for you !—six-foot-three apiece, and fifteen stone in their stockings. They would not care to go into training again now. Their day was great, but it has come to an end. There's a quartett !—all of one colour and one flag, mind and muscle combined—at least half-a-dozen first classes and a stray second or two to their joint names. That pale one of them was *facile princeps* at cricket, as well as on river and in schools. The two other most gigantic are the most celebrated “coaches” of the day. To them and their skill and science can the victories of Oxford be mainly traced. Here are a couple old members of the light-blue opposition, known high in tripos-lists, as well as at Henley poplars and on Putney waters, and as now on circuit and in King's-bench-walk ; not so gigantic as their predecessors, but, take them all round, men whom you would rather shake hands with than fight with on compulsion, whatever might be your own calibre. There are two who have ridden straighter and rowed harder and more races than perhaps any two in the pack. Talk of Dr. Skey's lucubrations and the terrors of alarmists, do *they* look the worse for wear? They can be backed at odds to dance on the graves of any twenty spectators drawn at hazard from the bank. One of them went,

from curiosity, *incognito* to a leading chest-doctor of the metropolis, and asked to be "sounded." The man of medicine tapped him, and laughed in his face. "Was he nervous? What could have made him waste his guinea?"

One more sketch, of a different caste, yet essential to the exertions of the giants as a jockey to a Derby favourite. That small, wiry, hawk-eyed little man, laying down the law so kindly to a six-foot friend ;—if he hadn't physique and sinew, he had more nerve and nous than any trio ; and records still tell of the losing race he stole with his rudder-lines from the fire round the fatal Poplar Point at Henley.

Ten-thirty. The race is due in a quarter of an hour, bar delays. Look at those horsemen. What chance can they have of getting through that crowd? The whole tow-path for nearly five miles is packed twenty deep, and when the top of the tide floods the lower levels of the causeway, the British populace will find it rather moist under foot. Meantime it will be a struggle for life between them and the cavalry, who will get into swing half a mile higher up, and go through the masses by sheer weight and momentum, till they come to a lock with the carriages down to the water's edge at Barnes.

"Oxford have won the toss again!" is the news. What luck! Will the tide never turn? The light blues at the windows of the Star and Garter look downcast, yet determined, at the evil omen.

The dark blues have been scanning the hurly-burly below them, or reading the comments and criticisms upon themselves in the morning papers. The hand of Putney

church-clock points near the fatal hour. Come on to the London Rowing Club boat-house.

Here are the old trio, Jemmy in centre in the neatest of paletôts ; Ruby and Ralph flanking him in dark-blue coats and spotless white below.

"That work on Thursday, when we both came down on the ebb, is enough to give us a line," says Ralph. "I don't say we are good ; but anyhow, they're worse, that's one comfort. Baines is a fearful hog, and can't do much work beyond thirty-nine a minute ; so it's no use spurting with him, and we can't well afford to spurt without him. I hoped Moor would have hammered him into shape by now ; but he hasn't half improved."

"He's an honest old beggar," says Ruby ; "he don't tire ; he sticks to it all the way."

"I think they all do that," says Ralph. "We always come in the last mile better than the first, and I know Cambridge have a rotten one or two among them ; they have only done the full course three times in the fortnight."

"Then they'll crack when it comes to a finish," says Jemmy sagaciously ; "but what's the line you had ?"

"Wells and Moor took it. The others had forty minutes the best of the tide, and were fifteen seconds longer than us. We started some way above the Ship ; so the public think the times are about the same ; but we are right. So I go upon that. We have fifteen seconds to the good somewhere or other, Heaven only knows where. I think it's in the last mile and a half. Wells made them the same as us down to Hammersmith, some

seconds the quicker to Chiswick church, but all that quarter of a minute to the bad by the aqueduct."

"We'll break their hearts somehow before the end," says Ruby; "it's only a question of biding the time."

"They're a neater lot to look at than we are," continues Ralph; "they are in first-rate time, at all events, for the first quarter of an hour, till they get pumped. And you know Baines is a sinner to get late, unless he gets a bit excited; then he goes into the other extreme, bolts like a rabbit, and is half an hour too soon."

"Who are favourites now?" interrogates Jemmy.

"We are still, but only from the prestige of having won before. The public, who wouldn't know one boat from another but for the uniforms, back us because we won last year. Those who know a little of rowing, and can see that Cambridge are better together and more even than we are, all the tide-way amateurs, are on them; and last of all, really good judges—so I say in my conceit—who can see that Cambridge clip the first part of the stroke in the air instead of the water, get short when they get pumped, and can't 'stay' the whole course, and still more those very few who can judge pace as well as style,—tell me it is a certainty for us if we don't get off too fast and force that old hog Baines out of what little form he has before he has got his second wind. So don't you funk if you see us astern at the Crab-tree. It will be a different story at Chiswick."

"First through Hammersmith Bridge has only been beaten once, and that was by Bagshawe," says Ruby, who has learnt old records by heart during the last month. "You must not wait too long, Ralph."

"Trust me. There's Cambridge launching, and Darrell calling to us." And Ralph went to the boat-house door.

"Good-bye : keep your tails up," said Jemmy as he shook hands with Ruby, and then submitted to an extortion of half-a-crown ere he could find a wherry to convey him to Lord Valehampton's private steamer.

"How exquisite ! how interesting !" ejaculated Lady Diana Page, Lord Sheffield's sister, at Jemmy's elbow, as the two crews paddled across the tide towards the starting buoys. "How beautifully they row!—all together, and all one colour. Tell me," said she, appealing to Jemmy, who, with Georgie on his arm, was standing by a paddle-box ; "where is the winning-post ? Is that it ?" pointing to a flag erected at the end of the Bishop of London's garden.

"No, it is a little farther off than that," replied Jemmy ; "you can't see it from here."

"How far ? Nearly a mile ?"

"About four miles and a half," said Jemmy, pulling out his opera-glasses.

"Four miles and a-half ! How frightful ! Won't they be tired when they get there ! Won't it be exhausting work ?"

"Not very ; they're in good condition, Lady Diana."

"What is good condition, Mr. Blake ?"

"The result of training."

"And what is training ?"

"Six weeks of hard work, strict diet, regular hours, and self-denial."

"Dear me, how interesting !" and her ladyship



balanced her glasses again, and reconnoitred the boats as they lay across tide a couple of hundred yards off.

"Get ready!—forward, all; paddle on," is the order to Oxford, and the oars rise and fall again as they come over to "station."

"I don't call that neat paddling for a 'Varsity eight," said Lord Sheffield critically, for he considered himself a connoisseur after having done duty in the Monarch at Eton, though at Trinity, Cambridge, he had preferred *otium cum dignitate*.

"It is not so good as it might be," said Jemmy, who, after a fresh introduction from Lord Valehampton, had sunk and ignored the curt personalities of which he had been lavish on the Croydon race-course; "but it is not so easy to sit a boat across tide, and with this chopping steamer swell running down underneath them." But he had his misgivings when he saw Baines's elbows sticking out at right angles, as that muscular Christian insisted upon finishing his stroke with that muscle which is the *ne plus ultra* of most novelists, but which is the most useless one in creation except for sheer gymnastics, trapeze, and pole performances—and mere lumber to an active and scientific boxer or oarsman—to wit, the biceps.

"Keep your elbows to your side, No. 4, and try to finish with your shoulders and not your upper arm," is Ruby's thoroughly-hackneyed admonition, as Baines's dog-eared elbows become painfully awkward to himself and the rest in the tossing swell of the steamer-paddles.

"That's more like rowing," is Lord Sheffield's opinion as Cambridge come out from off Simmonds' yard, the

oars all rising and falling with strict equality, and the light blue giving them a light and airy appearance compared to the dark and apparently more massive colours of Oxford. "Those fellows row in time and swing if you like," continued the critic; "it ought to be six to four on them instead of against them."

"Time is not everything, though I grant it goes a long way," hazarded Jemmy; "but if you look closely, you will see that they do not row so long forward, or get such a good hold of the first part of the stroke, as Oxford, though what work they do is, I grant, done the more evenly and together of the two."

"Not get hold of the first part of the stroke! Very good, Sir. Look how they fling themselves back at it! Their stroke's head shakes all over the place with the jerk as he lays hold of it; it is almost an exaggeration of watermen's rowing."

"Just so," said Jemmy, as Cambridge eased in front of their buoy and commenced turning; "but when they row on again, you will see that that hit of theirs is only attained by rowing some distance in the air, and so getting an impetus on the oar before it reaches the water; they lose the best part of the stroke. Those Oxford blades drop into the water at their full stretch back, and cover a good foot more of water behind the rowlock."

"I'll have a monkey on with you, and sink the odds, since we each fancy our own," said Lord Sheffield.

"I don't profess to bet, still less such large sums; but I'll make it a fiver if you like, just for the sake of standing up for my old university."

"Say a pony," pleaded Lord Sheffield, who thought it

was hardly worth while producing his betting-book for such a small amount.

"I'll split the difference and make it a tenner to oblige you," said Jemmy with complaisance ; and as half a loaf was better than no bread, Lord Sheffield closed with the offer and booked the bet.

"What's the matter?" was the next interrogatory of the company on deck, as the eights, having turned, lay-to and drifted below their stations, and made no effort to get to work.

"No use going while those things lie in the light," explained Jemmy, pointing to a couple of miscreant steamers deeply laden and swaying with the cream of Cockneydom, bustling straight in front of the boats to make the most of a start, and throwing up a swell that broke into the bow-side oars of each eight as it lay-to.

A general hail of "Come back!" was raised by more orderly steamers in the rear to these evil-doers in the front. Not a bit of it; "Citizen XYZ" and "Ironboat 194" had no intention of surrendering vantage-ground in a hurry. What odds to them if the race were delayed an hour, or the competitors half-filled with the sewage surf of dirty old Father Thames? They had got the start, and meant to keep it.

So a couple of wherries of inefficient river-police rowed up in detail to the offenders to expostulate, and get plenty of Billingsgate for their pains, but no tangible benefit. Then the umpire tried his hand at persuasion, and was treated with tacit contempt. Then Lascelles, the Cambridge stroke, paddled his boat down and attempted re-

monstrance, but was only laughed at, told to "row on if he was a man," and "there was nothing to be afeard on."

So Darrell and Lascelles confabulated across the water, and then deliberately each eight paddled straight back to the boathouses as if to go ashore, and tidings were sent to the ruffians in the middle of the stream that unless they backed astern within five minutes there would be no race that day.

This was quite a different pair of shoes. The two presidents looked fully in earnest, and the angry roar of the disappointed British populace sounded not unlike an omen of Lynch-law for the evil-doers if they longer spoiled the public sport; so slowly and sulkily they steamed their way astern, and thus once more the two eights came back to station.

"A provoking delay!" quoth Lord Sheffield, who wanted to get back early to Tattersall's for "comparing."

"All in our favour," said Jemmy, who noted that the tide had all but run itself out, and little more than a drain was oozing up the centre of the stream; "the race will last three minutes longer."

"Oxford have the station again. What infernal luck!" said Lord Sheffield, as the boats ranged alongside of each other. "How many times running is it that they have won it?"

"It's no great value to-day," said Jemmy. "Tide's almost on the turn; what little stream is left is with Cambridge."

Searle came up in his wherry to the sterns of the rival cutters.

"Forward, all!" What horrible tension and suspension! There go his hands up aloft. They're off.

"Why, Cambridge are going clean away from them!" says Lord Sheffield, as the boats shoot by the rank of steamers, the light-blue flag already twenty feet to the fore. "That Lascelles has got some dash about him, if you like!"

"Cambridge wins!" roar the steamer cargoes as they get under way, and charge helter-skelter in pursuit, engineers cautiously hanging rope-fenders overboard, lest sides should be stove-in, as the hulls jostle and creak and crash against one another in the hurly-burly. "Cambridge wins!" echo the crowd on the tow-path. It is light blue's turn this time, and public sympathy is with them.

Only passing the London Boathouse even now, and Cambridge half a length to the good!

"Why, that fellow's asleep! he's no life in him! t'other's the stroke!" is the general comment on Oxford, as Ralph swings deliberately and methodically forward, hardly more than thirty-seven strokes to the minute, while Cambridge are doing a good bit the other side of forty strokes in the same time.

Old Baines is laying himself out like an honest grampus, but he is *very* wild; he does not half like being led so rapidly—not that his eyes are out of the boat, but he can hear the rush of the Cambridge oars behind him, and their coxswain singing out, "You've got it all your own way! Keep it long!" Good need, but little avail, that last stereotyped caution.

Oxford seem getting a rough time of it. Bishop's

Creek has not been left two hundred yards behind, yet Cambridge are three-quarters of a length ahead, and still improving their position. The steamboats under the Fulham shore put on high pressure, and draw up to the boats. Oxford in the rear will get the worst of this as the paddles suck away the water from under them, and drag them back.

"Are they clear?" asks Ralph of Ruby in his swing, as they shoot under the first willow of Craven.

"Not yet, I think; but they're going so wide round the corner."

"Don't hug too close; there's no tide in-shore. Get the men together; I can't quicken till they settle."

And Ralph, with the knack of talking in his swing between the strokes, is as cool as if he were rowing a solitary trial against time.

So Ruby slangs the whole crew, man by man, to "Keep it long, 6!" "Get well forward, 5!" "Mind the beginning, 3!" "Mind the time, 4!" and as they commence the "shoot" beyond the Point, Baines actually gets into time and an approach to swing; and the rest of the team lengthen out and settle down to a mighty sweeping stroke through the water, as Ralph works up to thirty-nine strokes in the minute, and then increases no more.

And Lascelles has now a clear lead, his men, to all appearance, with plenty of go in them, dashing away briskly at the stroke in good heart and good spirits.

The Crab-tree is passed, and there is half-a-length daylight between the boats, and Lascelles hugs himself as he swings forward in his second wind, and feels that he has turned the long forward tide of ill-luck. *He* has no

symptom of distress : he has hardly ever known such a feeling in his life, and he judges his crew by his own stamina as he piles on a new spurt, and has a length clear daylight at the Soap-works.

"Take the centre arch," is his order to his coxswain ;  
"no tide in the Surrey shore !"

"By G—d ! they're taking their water. Oxford are in the wash !" exclaims Lord Sheffield, as the Cambridge boat sheers out to clear the steamboat pier, and the long rolling wash of their jumping keel works more and more into the centre of the stream, till off the Distillery it strikes up the side of the Oxford ship, flushes into the stroke-side rowlocks, wets all the flannels on that side, tosses the boat from side to side with its cross action, sends old Baines's feather a mile over his head, and his oar at a see-saw with all the rest.

"Keep them together, Ruby ! keep them together !" says Ralph, for the first time with a dash of anxiety in his tone, as he feels the wash and its results, and the weight drags upon his oar, as only two out of the three on his side are in the water with him. But he keeps up his length and reach at all hazards, though the strain for the next minute is heavy on his shoulder-sockets, and the respite of second wind has hardly yet fully reached him.

"Cambridge for ever !" is the chorus of the populace, as the boats shoot Hammersmith Bridge in Indian file a clear length apart, the steamers creaking and groaning as they drop funnels and jostle each other wildly, and those counter-skippers who have sported dark-blue rosettes, with light-blue in reserve, surreptitiously and judiciously

affect an exchange when they witness the way the battle is going.

The agent of a betting clique sees the state of affairs, slips a carrier-pigeon to his pals to "tip" them to lump the money on light blue, and chuckles at the "robbery" which he sees on the cards. Public feeling is unanimous with Cambridge—some ultra-enthusiasts even attempt to raise a groan and hiss for Oxford, as they toil behind and shoot the Suspension Bridge and its myriads of white glaring faces, a clear length to the bad, wild as hawks, and decidedly out of form.

The Cantab coxswain sheers to the left as soon as he clears the bridge, and forgets the back eddy of the pier. Ruby keeps on more in mid-stream, and off Biffin's the wash has again cleared his boat, and all is smooth-going—Cambridge wide in shore.

"A hundred to ten on Cambridge!" says Lord Sheffield as he puts down his glasses with a satisfied air.

"I'll take you!" says Jemmy laconically.

"Well, it's long odds, you know; say hundred to twenty!"

"Done with you!" says Jemmy, still looking through his glasses, and Lord Sheffield extracts his betting-books to make a mem. of the same.

"They're beaten, are they not?" says Georgie, who has been dead silent at Jemmy's elbow for the last ten minutes, and now looks up with something like a whimper.

"Not that I know of, child," says Jemmy. "They haven't gone half the distance yet. Wait five minutes more;" and he hands her his glasses.



"That fellow Lascelles is taking a pull at his men now that he has got it in hand," says Lord Sheffield, as the boats remain *in statu quo* past the Doves and on to the Lead-mills.

"More like they're hanging on him," says Jemmy.

"Why, nonsense, they're rowing as quick a stroke as ever!"

"Just so. Forty-four a minute can't go from Putney to Mortlake;" and Jemmy consults his watch.

"All safe!" says Ruby, as they reach the tail end of Chiswick Eyot; "we are coming up fast."

A little exaggeration on Ruby's part, and no need to hocus Ralph, who is as cool as ever again. True, Oxford are now going the fastest through the water, but they are outside in the river, and Cambridge for a mile and a half beyond Hammersmith have a long steady curve of a semicircle in their favour, which helps much to maintain vantage-ground.

Yet there is no doubt of it. There is only half a length daylight at the top of the Eyot; Oxford are improving every yard; Baines is in time again, his elbows not more than six inches from his ribs at each finish, and the old sinner whips his oar through like a sledge-hammer, as he once more, after a long break, hears the splash of Cambridge oars by his right ear.

"We must have the inside at Barnes—they are making a push for it!" says Ruby hurriedly.

"Watch backs!" says Ralph shortly.

"Eyes in front, and watch the backs!" takes up Ruby, and full forty a minute are instantly going in the Oxford boat. Before Chiswick church is cleared, the

Cambridge rudder is jumping scarcely clear of the Oxford flag.

The Cantab coxswain sees his failure, and unable to cross goes back to his own water, and gains no ground by it.

Lascalles can't make it out, he is far from rowed out himself; if all were like him Oxford would see no more of Cambridge this side of the Ship; but he has reckoned without his crew.

He must win that inside corner at all hazards; his boat had always the turn of speed, if it had nothing else, he thinks, and he piles on a wondrous spurt to draw a clear lead once more.

Thrice he shoots his rudder away from the dark-blue flag; thrice the crew falter behind him, under the high pressure; thrice Ruby holds up his hat to his men, and Ralph works up to forty-one a minute; it is neck or nothing; but Baines is warm to his work, and makes no mistake this time.

Off the Duke's bathing-place, and well into the wide waste of Corney Reach. For a third time Ralph has overlapped Lascalles, yet the latter has another spurt ready if his men will take it up. An ugly barge is tacking up with the tide, making for the Middlesex shore, dead in the track of Oxford. To go behind it will be to foul Cambridge; to go round the bows will take Oxford into the bight, and lose two or three lengths. But Ruby has his wits about him, and steers as if nothing were in the way. The barge will be gone to the right by the time he gets there: if it is not, he must easy a stroke, and still lose less ground than if he went round the bows.

So he makes the best of a bad job.

"There's a smash coming, by G—d!" says Lord Sheffield, who would prefer Cambridge to win without a fluke.

"Wait a bit," says Jemmy Blake. The barge drifts sleepily on; Ruby is just ready to hail, "Draw in your oars bow side;" but there is a foot to spare. Old Baines shakes his head as the black shadow looms past him.

"Well done, boy!" says Ralph, as he sees what has passed.

"Well done!" murmurs everyone in the fleet behind.

"That lad has handled the ribbons before," says Lord Sheffield in sullen appreciation.

Georgie looks up to read Jemmy's face.

They have nearly completed the shoot to the Middlesex shore; in less than a minute they will commence the last long curve to the right. The pace is hotter than at the start—something must crack before long. Flesh and blood can't stand such locomotive high-pressure.

"It's all over!" says Jemmy, calmly and caressingly to Georgie, who, a hundred yards behind the struggle, can hardly make out clearly the merits of the race, but still sees to her sorrow Oxford astern.

"What is all over?" she asks, prepared for the worst.

"The race, child!" putting up his glasses with ostentatious deliberation.

"Is there no chance for us?" she asks piteously.

"No chance? Why, we have got them dead licked. Cambridge oars are going like a peal of bells."

Hardly fair on Mr. Blake's part; but he must be pardoned for exaggerating in his satisfaction.

One of the bowside of the light blue is getting wofully

short, doubling over his oar, and late after all the rest ; and one stroke side feather is hopelessly high ; but they still stick manfully to their work, and struggle like fiends to hold that dearly-bought lead.

"Those Oxford men have been licked long ago, but they will not know it," says Lord Sheffield.

"Just so," says Jemmy, who finds that he must pull out his glasses again. "So were we at Waterloo."

"However, Cambridge are still their own length to the good ; and even if they are level in the last quarter mile, they must win for speed in the run in ;" and Lord Sheffield consoles himself with his theory.

"I'll lay you a hundred even they don't win !" says Jemmy sharply, scared out of his due propriety and horror of gambling in his hot enthusiasm.

"Well—no, thank you ; I think I have enough on already ;" and Lord Sheffield once more nervously adjusts his glasses.

"Oxford are coming with a rush now ; look !" say the audience behind, as dark blue come up hand-over-hand, while they swing round below the Bull's Head, in full view of the crush of carriages and horsemen, and of the myriads that throng housetops and balconies along the whole line of Barnes-terrace.

Not a bit of it ! Oxford are already at full stretch, and can go no faster ; but they can still stay on. Cambridge have cracked. That last gallant rush of Lascelles has broken them up. They have been rowing little better than six oars for the last hundred yards. Oxford swing up level to them at the Bull's Head, and Ralph can't restrain a glimpse at Lascelles as he collars him. For

another last effort, for six strokes more, it is a neck-and-neck race; then all is over; even Lascelles is wearying and flagging under the extra strain; the rest of the crew are all to pieces—there is nothing left them but their pluck; it cannot save defeat, but it defies disgrace, as still they struggle on. Oxford shoot past them man by man. They have shot clear as they dash under Barnes Bridge. Ralph has settled down again to a slower stroke; but daylight appears, and the gap grows wider and wider as they leave the White Hart behind them.

“All over!” says the discriminating British public, always ready to cheer victory on either side, and who have, after two changes, come back to the same opinion with which they saw the boats prepare for the start; and once more the roar of enthusiasm declares for Oxford, for having redeemed early shortcomings below Hammer-smith by one of the most wondrous stern-races on record.

“I hope you are satisfied now, Georgie,” says Jemmy Blake, as the race, such as is left of it, swings round to Mortlake; and she looks up and laughs in his face.

“There’s the Ship,” points out Jemmy to her, as they come farther and farther round the curve, and the view is widened to all of them.

Hard-set and fine-trained though Oxford are, there is not one but feels the tax of that late fearful struggle to save the cross in Corney Reach, and the slackened stroke at Barnes Bridge was most luxurious to the toughest of them.

Baines feels justified at last in taking the liberty to let his eyes wander from the back in front of him as the turrets of Mortlake Brewery loom past his right shoulder,

and he knows that there is but a minute's more exertion left. Beer and skittles, corn and clover, for him now for a long time to come.

"Eyes in the boat there!" snaps Ruby, lynx-eyed; and the abashed Baines returns his thoughts to the last stern realities of the finish.

"Now then, reach out! Take her in, all of you! Let them see that you aint a bit pumped." And the boat dances over the tide-way for the last twenty strokes, while cannons boom and the roar of the multitude swells up the reaches to Richmond, till old Jack Phelps, in his flag-boat, gives his fiat "By three clear lengths."

"All over now! Clothe up. Turn the boats, and paddle back to Putney."

Hard training recovers even the ultra distress of the losers sufficiently for this before ten minutes have elapsed.

Look at them now. As they swing down upon the fast falling ebb, faster because that they spurted up upon slack water, Oxford are romping, rolling, and larking hilariously. Baines has already caught two crabs since the White Hart, to atone for having behaved himself in the race. Cambridge sad, subdued, and silent, are moving once more in that perfect time and even feather with which they started,—the neatest of the two to look at; and so the victors think as they pause and look at the rivals.

"We can't have been so dusty, after all, to have licked such a lot as that."

Now for a crush and a medley to get back to town for the next four hours. You good people of the audience have seen all you want, and are about as much the wiser as nine-tenths of the mob who go to Epsom Downs to

get fuddled on a Derby-day ; half of you even now are under the delusion that the two scratch eights of London Rowing Club and Leander Juniors, who paddled past you a minute ago, were the university eights on their homeward journey, and cheered them accordingly, to the astonishment of the flattered tyros. So long as you are pleased, so are we ; you have paid your money for your spree, and are quite welcome to your choice.

A few, the thranitai will stay behind to condole with the losers, and congratulate the victors, to join the sociality of the lunch, and the revelry of the banquet at evening.

So Jemmy Blake hurries Lord Valehampton's steamer back to Putney Pier, and meets Ralph and Ruby in full radiance as they push their way from the London Boat-house through a medley of costermongers, counter-skippers, and general admirers, who try all round to shake them by the hand and pat them on the back. "Well done !" is all he says, but the tone is quite enough. Ruby looks as demure as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

As they pass under the Star and Garter, Jemmy says :

"Come on board Valehampton's steamer for a second, Ralph ; your sisters and Georgie want to see you ; they told me to bring you to be looked at ; and there's plenty of champagne-cup on board."

"Not for a hundred," says Ralph. "I sha'n't drink or mix my liquors till I get to lunch at Mr. Phillips's. One can't be too careful after a bucketing. One-fourth one's usual standard of liquor would upset me now."

"Never mind the liquor, then, but come and see the girls ; they are dying to meet you."

"They'll live till the afternoon, I think. I aint going to be mobbed now, at all events. I sleep at Uncle Valehampton's, so I shall see them all as I go in to dress for dinner. You got that ticket for the dinner, did you not? I'll meet you in Willis's Rooms at seven. Make my excuses;" and he dragged Ruby off to the White Lion.

"You are a better judge than I am, Mr. Blake," said Lord Sheffield, as he filled up a cheque for a hundred and ten in the saloon while they steamed home down Chelsea Reach.

"I haven't done such a thing for ten years," said Jemmy blandly, as he pocketed the spoil, half ashamed of it. "I am extremely sorry that I should have broken my rule like this to your detriment;" and Lord Sheffield shrugged his shoulders and smiled a congratulatory remark as they ran under Pimlico Pier.

"Jemmy, you shouldn't bet like that; I was quite ashamed of you," said Georgie, when they had chartered a cab to Eaton-place.

"It's very funny; I haven't done such a thing since I was at Oxford; but I was obliged to back my opinion to-day," he pleaded apologetically.

"You must not do so again; you won't, will you?" she added, half dictatorially, half in entreaty.

"Not if you don't like it, child;" and Jemmy groaned in spirit as he glanced at the little pink cherub-face upturned at him. "You shall have the cheque, and do what you like with it."

"I won't touch the horrid thing—yes, I will; you shall cash it first, and then bring it to me, and send it to the



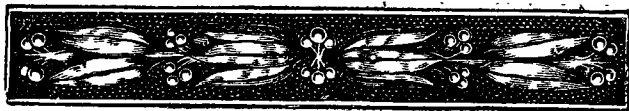
Bishop of London's Fund as a gambler's conscience-money."

"I'm no gambler, really," said Jemmy, by no means flattered at the *nom de plume* suggested for him.

"All speculation's gambling," said Georgie authoritatively; "you'll do it, won't you?" and Jemmy checked the cab and bade the man drive straight to the London and Westminster Bank.

"There is your plunder, young one," he said with a smile, as they landed at Eaton-place; "send it where you like." And he went to hunt for some lunch with a first-class appetite.





## CHAPTER XXXI.

### APRIL VERDURE.

**M**R. JAMES BLAKE sat over his breakfast at 150 Eaton-place, on the following Monday. Georgie and Ruby flanked him, the former presiding at the urn, the latter deep in the *Times* account of the boat-race; the M.F.H. unravelling correspondence.

A large official document informed him what he knew, by private information, on the Sunday afternoon—to wit, that the appeal which he had lodged against the result of the late East Valeshire election, had been allowed by the committee appointed to report upon it; that they had unseated Mr. Cook for bribery, corruption, and informality, and installed in his place, after due scrutiny, Mr. James Blake of Vale House.

Two or three irrelevant business-letters followed in succession. Then Mr. Blake paused, as was his custom, to contemplate the superscription, and attempt to divine the author, of the letter which he next took in hand be-

fore he should break the seal and so solve the problem for himself.

The postmarks were of but little use to him; the letter had originated from London, had gone down to the Old Vale, and thence followed him on Saturday back to his chambers. His guardian there in charge had sent the epistle to Eaton-place that same morning. The handwriting was unknown to him—apparently a plain, matter-of-fact-looking gentleman's handwriting, written with a quill, and not the least savour of "business" about it.

Mr. Blake could guess nothing, so he broke the seal, and opened his eyes wider, and clenched his teeth viciously, as he ran over three pages of note-paper. Ruby was still immersed in the *Times*; Georgie was studying the official document from Westminster which Jemmy had handed to her; neither noticed his look of horror as he proceeded, and each looked up in sudden astonishment to hear him at last exclaim in literal agony—

"God ha' mercy on us! what an awful go!"

"What is it, Jemmy?" was the mutual and simultaneous interrogatory; and Jemmy sat back in his chair with the air of a man determined to face the worst to its utmost, as he handed Georgie the following:

"17 Lowndes-square, S.W.

"April —th.

"DEAR SIR,—My daughter, like a dutiful child, confided to me, on her arrival here, the substance of your conversation with her on the night of February the 15th, and also told me the intention you had then announced

to her of writing to myself a formal proposal for her hand so soon as she should have arrived in town.

"I need not say that no communication from yourself has ever reached me.

"If this is the result of misunderstanding on your part, or miscarriage on that of the postal authorities, you will, I feel confident, be gratified to be relieved of the suspense under which you yourself must have so long been painfully labouring, by my thus waiving ceremony and taking the initiative in communication.

"If, however, as I should be loth to believe, you have been cruelly and unscrupulously trifling with the feelings of a confiding and affectionate-minded girl, I should feel disposed to treat the affair with the silent contempt it merits, were it not that the distress of mind under which my daughter is labouring, to the endangerment of her health and strength, prompts me indignantly to ask by what right you could presume to play fast and loose with a young lady's affections, and that young lady my own darling daughter.

"Awaiting the favour of a reply, I have the honour to be

"Your obedient servant,

"HENRY TREHERNE VANE.

"To JAMES BLAKE, Esq.

"*Old Vale House, Ashton.*"

If Jemmy's face had been worthy of Kean as he waded through this document, Georgie Warren's would have been an invaluable study for Miss Bateman as

*Leah*, as she in her turn came to the end, and put the *coup de grâce* to her horror by reading the signature.

Then she laid the letter down with forced deliberation, and, without another word or look, rose and walked straight out of the room.

Ruby looked at Jemmy for explanation — Jemmy pointed speechless to the letter, and Ruby took his turn at it, and then said :

“Clara Vane, hey ! I thought you were horrid thick with her that night at your own house. So you’ve been and gone and done it, Jemmy?”

“My God, Ruby !” shouted Jemmy, his indignation getting the better of his propriety and usual piety, “do you think for a moment that I ever proposed to the young woman?”

“Not if you say you didn’t,” said Ruby quietly, and half apologetically ; “but what did you say that she could have interpreted in that way?”

“Heaven only knows ! Hold hard ; give me the letter again ;” and Jemmy pored over it for a minute in perplexity, then, thumping the table and drawing a cup of hot tea into his lap, he exclaimed—

“The 15th ! that was the day of Lady Kenilworth’s ball !”

“The *bal masqué* ?” asked Ruby.

“The beastly thing ! I had sworn at first I wouldn’t go. O Lord ! O Lord !” and Jemmy laid his head on his hands to cogitate upon his conduct that night to the masks with whom he had danced.

He had made himself more agreeable than usual—he could not deny that—for, *imprimis*, he was incognito ; and secondly, Georgie had made him feel so thoroughly

pleased with himself, that he gave all his partners the benefit of his good-humour and high spirits ; but he'd be hanged if he had committed himself, or anything like it ! He was above that sort of thing ; and in a public place like a ball-room, too ! Nor had he given any clue by which anyone else could have divined his identity ; he didn't think that Georgie had even called him audibly by his name, his mask had never slipped, he had not taken off his gloves, no one could have had a chance of seeing the scar of that broken knuckle of his. No ; he had a clear conscience ; he never knew she had been there, or, by Jove, he would not have gone. He didn't believe he had danced with Clara Vane at all ; there was no mistaking her gabble all the world over, and she could have had no clue to him—not a bit of it ; some other chap had taken his name in vain and played the fool with her ; rot him ! he'd bread his neck short off if he could trace him !

And then Mr. Blake sat up again and recapitulated his thoughts and conclusions to Ruby.

"I see," said Ruby sagely. "Old Vane's got the wrong sow by the ear."

"Why, hang the man !" broke in Jemmy, "whatever I may have possibly said that a fool of a girl may have construed the wrong way, at least I'll swear that no girl that night said a word about her governor, nor I about writing to hers. That clenches the case !" and Jemmy, with a tone of relief, turned to mop up the tea that had been soaking into his trousers.

"And what made Georgie bolt like that ?" was Ruby's next query.

"Clara Vane is a great friend of hers. I suppose she thought herself aggrieved by my having jilted an ally of hers," said Jemmy meditatively, but by no means candidly. A new light seemed to dawn upon him, and if the truth had thus been brought to the surface, he would forgive and bless Clara Vane to the end of her days for having been the means of betraying it.

No; and Jemmy pondered again; Clara Vane may have been an ally of Georgie's, but "Uncle" Jemmy was always a still greater one; whatever may have been the latter's faults, Georgie would always have sided, he was sure, with him against Clara, or against any young woman in the world. Not it: there must be a deeper-rooted motive than that, though Georgie would not doubtless confess it even to herself. Things looked brighter than for many a day. And he poured himself out a fresh cup of tea, and took a bite at his rasher of bacon.

"And you'll stick to it that you don't mean to marry her?" asked Ruby.

"Not marry her? Who?" exclaimed Jemmy, off his guard, and nearly letting the cat out of the bag.

"Clara Vane, I suppose, unless there are a brace of them."

"Clara Vane? God forbid! She has got tongue enough for ten. She may be an excellent and affectionate young woman; but — wouldn't touch her with the end of a barge-pole." And Jemmy bolted his fresh cup of tea, stuck a crust of dry toast in his teeth, and, kicking over his chair, announced his intention to "go and have it out at once with old Vane."

And he left Ruby there and then, though it was not yet 10 A.M.

Mr. H. T. Vane, M.P., had the nous to keep from his daughter's inquisitive eyes the card which Mr. Blake sent in to him, and, quitting his breakfast, at once prepared for battle in his study.

"It is unfair to tackle a man unawares, and fasting," he thought, as he left his grill to grow cold and clammy ere his return; but he did not shirk his duty, and he shut the door behind him with the air of a man who is determined to "know the reason why."

Jemmy took stock of him with a thoroughly theatrical scan—from forehead to toes, from toes to forehead again—and then promptly opened fire with, "This is a pretty kettle of fish, Mr. Vane!"

"Eh?" said Mr. Vane, staggered at the outset by such a way of looking at the business.

"This is a pretty mess that Miss Vane has got me into."

"A pretty mess, Sir! got *you* into, Mr. Blake! You speak as if you were the sufferer by this conduct, and not my child! May I ask what are your intentions?"

"Certainly, Sir," said Jemmy, in his blandest tones, reflecting that he had not, so far, been very explicit.

"Will you take a seat, Sir?" said the M.P., who was better pleased with the tone of Jemmy's last sentence.

Jemmy subducted his coat-tails, and sat him down; Mr. Vane subsided *vis-à-vis* to him, and placed a hand upon each knee, with an air of strict attention.

"Allow me to explain," said Jemmy.



Mr. Vane looked dissatisfied, and bowed codlly.

"Your daughter is under a delusion, Sir," said Jemmy.

"I agree with you there, Sir; she thought she was dealing with a man of honour."

"Personalities afterwards, if you please, Mr. Vane," said Jemmy, as blandly as ever.

Mr. Vane frowned, but recollecting himself, he sat back with an air of resignation.

"Listen to me," said Jemmy, opening his left palm, and laying his right-hand fingers on it one by one as he proceeded: "I never proposed to your daughter—I never proposed to any young lady—on that evening in question;" and Jemmy cleared his throat, then proceeded: "I have recalled the date to which you refer—the 15th of February was the day of Lady Kenilworth's *bal masqué*. I was not aware that your daughter had been there. I certainly met her nowhere else during that day, or in that week or month."

"She was there, from Sir John Marshall's," said Mr. Vane thickly, beginning to see that Clara had put her foot in it.

"I admit that I danced with various young ladies; I admit that I talked to them; I deny that I said a word that could have been construed into anything like a proposal. I don't believe I danced with your daughter at all," continued Jemmy; "I feel sure that I should have recognised her voice and manner." (Mr. Vane looked better pleased.) "Finally, whatever I said to any young lady that could by any means have been distorted or misinterpreted, I never said or heard a word about writing to or hearing of or from her father; this satisfies me

that Miss Vane has confused someone else with me ; and he is no doubt breaking his heart at her silence all the time," he added spitefully.

"You talked—I beg your pardon, the gentleman in a mask talked about his electioneering at that time, and referred to the fact that my daughter was in charge of her ladyship ; whoever he was, he seemed to know all about her, and to imply that she knew as much of him," said Mr. Vane severely. "Whoever he was he has never written to me—or to her ; there has been dead silence on his part. You will allow, at least, that it is a most extraordinary case, an incomprehensible case."

"Certainly," said Jemmy, who thought the matter was now as clear as mud. "As to the gentleman not having written subsequently as you say he arranged to do, it is but just possible that he too, like Miss Vane, made an error, and fancied that he was speaking to someone else ; and having afterwards discovered his blunder, thought it best to keep silence to shelter himself and do no further mischief."

"I see what you mean, Sir," said Mr. Vane, who thought that he divined the *deus ex machinâ*, and came to the conclusion that Mr. Blake was cleverly, though perhaps not unwarrantably, mendacious in denying that he had danced with Clara, and pondered in his mind who could be the young lady for whom he had mistaken his daughter.

"I hope, Sir, you are satisfied," said Jemmy blandly, as he rose and held out his hand.

"Quite satisfied, Mr. Blake ; and I must express my regret for having thus misinterpreted and accused you."

"Don't mention it, Sir, I beg," said Jemmy, who reflected upon the display of feeling on the part of Georgie which Mr. Vane's letter had elicited, and rejoiced greatly.

"Good-bye, then," said Jemmy, as the M.P. took his proffered hand.

"Good-bye, Mr. Blake," said Mr. Vane, feeling that the last chance was gone when Jemmy expressed no wish to see Clara before he left; and he rang the bell for a servant to show his visitor to the door.

Jemmy hastened back to Eaton-place; Georgie had just gone out to eleven-o'clock service. Ruby was hanging his legs over the back of a chair; a note had come for Jemmy, summoning him down to the Lower House by midday upon urgent business. There was no help for it; he must see Georgie later on; so he told Ruby of his duel with Mr. Vane, but reserved to himself the conclusions he had drawn as to his "double," and fell back upon a havannah. Then he took a cab to Westminster.

"Georgie, come here," said Ruby peremptorily, when she came back from church.

Georgie came and looked at him; she was black under the eyes, a thing Ruby had never before seen in her.

"Why did you walk off from Jemmy in that rude way at breakfast?"

"Clara Vane is a friend—I mean, an old schoolfellow of mine," she replied in a dignified manner, yet obeying submissively Ruby's fraternal cross-examination. "It was very wrong of Jemmy to jilt her. I couldn't help being angry at the moment;" and Georgie's conscience pricked her as it never had before at her false excuses.

"You have no business to say he jilted her; he never said a word <sup>to</sup> her. It was the Kenilworth's *bal masqué*; he didn't know she was there, and didn't dance with her, that he knows of. He swears he never proposed, and would never think of her at any price; he was quite horrified at the idea of marrying her. Someone else put his foot in it, and popped to her, and Clara took the chap for Jemmy. He's been and had such a row with old Vane since breakfast! You must beg his pardon," said Ruby dictatorially, "the instant he comes in again."

And Georgie remembered the date of the *bal masqué*, and how she had noted at least the company in which the dove-silk and spangles was *not*; and a revulsion came over her as she put her arm round Ruby's neck, and, as novelists hydrostatically say, "burst into tears."





## CHAPTER XXXII.

### TWO NEGATIVES.

**M**R. BLAKE went round by the Carlton, and there stopped his cab for a few seconds. As he came out, he met Algernon Paget on the steps.

"How are you, old chap?" said Paget affectionately, and hastened to pour forth his congratulations upon the verdict of the St. Stephen's committee.

Jemmy was bland and grateful as ever.

"Where are you staying?" interrogated Paget. "I called at your chambers on Sunday, but you were not in."

"I am with Colonel Warren, in Eaton-place."

"O! I dined there on Saturday night, and I am calling this afternoon before I go back to the Vale."

"I was dining with Ralph Romilly and the crews on 'Saturday,'" said Jemmy; "that was how we did not meet. Nice race, wasn't it?"

"Magnificent!" said Paget, who had no jealousy about him, at least on that score; "your Cousin Romilly's

pluck and generalship are the talk of all London; the ladies are dying about him."

"More than he is about them," said Jemmy sardonically. "When do you go back to the Vale?"

"To-morrow afternoon: I mean to be at Cross Coppice on Wednesday. When do you close for the season?"

"Next week is my last, and high time too; half the packs have shut off already, and the blackthorn will be out in a fortnight or so. We shall wind-up Wednesday week at my house—lawn-meet; come and see the end of us. Can't wait for a May fox."

"Ta-ta!" said Algernon, delicately as Agag, and he sauntered up the steps.

Jack Marshall almost butted into Jemmy as the latter again turned to his hansom.

He too had ample congratulations as a neighbour, if not as a politician, for Mr. Blake's dethronement of William Cook, Esq.

"Many thanks," said Jemmy, who felt quite cordial to Jack for the good turn he had unwittingly done him. "Come and dine with me in the Old Vale on Wednesday after Cross Coppice. I suppose you are going back, now that the race is over; though all of us seem to shirk a long rattle in Whortle woods to-day. I'd ask you to dine with me to-night, but the fact is, I'm not my own master; I am staying with the Warrens."

"Colonel Warren's! where is that?" asked Jack cautiously and anxiously. "Lowndes-square?"

"150 Eaton-place," said Jemmy, pricking his ears.

"Good-bye," said Jack cordially and hurriedly, for he

had already made up his mind ; and Jemmy tumbled once more into his hansom and went to expedite his business at St. Stephen's.

"Mr. Marshall," said Colonel Warren's butler at 1 P.M., as Georgie sat alone, in anything but good spirits, in the library. Ruby had gone out riding on Georgie's horse.

"Tell Colonel Warren," said Georgie, who didn't care to receive the guest herself.

"The colonel is out, Miss, and he left word that he should not be back for lunch."

"Where is Mr. Marshall?"

"In the drawing-room, Miss."

And Georgie had nothing for it but to do the honours.

"He has come for lunch, I suppose," she cogitated. "Well, he shall have as much as he likes, if he will wait till Ruby comes in ; I won't entertain him by myself."

Jack Marshall's manner was shyly *empressé*. "I thought I should never hear or see anything of you again," he said, when they had shaken hands.

"I haven't seen you since you had that horrid blow on the head," said Georgie sympathisingly ; "I was so sorry. You know that Jemmy has turned out Mr. Cook and got in himself?" she added exultingly.

Yes ; Jack Marshall knew all about it. He could not make out how to begin ; Georgie seemed so pertinaciously reserved and shy about past events. He must make a plunge and get to the bottom of the mystery.

"You did not tell me that you had changed your home," said he reproachfully.

"I have not seen you since papa took it, that I know of," replied she, puzzled at the challenge.

"What made him give up the Lowndes-square house?"

"Lowndes-square! He never had one there, Mr. Marshall. He only took this a fortnight ago, for the season."

Jack doubted his senses. "Georgie," he broke in piteously, "you are not going to give me up, are you?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Marshall?" she asked, more dignified than alarmed. It was only when her heart was touched that Georgie ever lost self-possession.

"I wrote to Colonel Warren and you both, and my letters came back through the Dead-Letter Office. It was cruel of you to deceive me like that."

"Wrote to papa! I dare say you did. It's nothing to do with me; please explain yourself. What do you mean by all this? I never deceived you." But as she spoke the solution flashed into her mind, and she sat breathless for Jack's reply.

"What do I mean! What I say; and what I said six weeks ago, when I told you that I loved you better than anything in the world, and you told me to write at once to Colonel Warren."

"Mr. Marshall!" said Georgie quietly, and with surprised dignity.

"If you like to chuck me overboard now, I suppose you can," said Jack sulkily.

"You forget yourself, Mr. Marshall, and circumstances also," said Georgie, anxious to give him a clue to his blunder and get him out of the house as soon as possi-



ble ; "I am glad to say that you never used such language to me before to-day."

"Not at Lady Kenilworth's?" gasped Jack Marshall.

"Certainly not ; you have made a mistake."

"And if I have, you know now what I mean and what I say. You do care for me a little, don't you?" said Jack, clasping his hands in entreaty. "I shall be a baronet some day, and my governor will give me fifteen hundred a-year at once, to start upon. Don't say no!"

"You have made a mistake, Mr. Marshall, in every way," said Georgie, drawing herself up with dignity. "I am sorry that you have been deceived ; but you deceived yourself. Please excuse me. Ruby will be back in a few minutes, if you like to stay for lunch." And she sailed out of the room, with a stately bow at the doorway, and went straight up to her room. She did not cry ; she had enough of that in the morning ; she only stamped her feet and looked out of the window.

"A pair of silly people ! each thinking everybody is everybody else. Why don't they marry each other, instead of bothering Jemmy and me?"

And she saw Ruby riding down the Place and turn into the mews. She heard the front door bang, and went away from the light, lest if Jack Marshall were making his exit he should look up at the window. She was very angry, but too much relieved to be altogether unhappy. How she wished Jemmy would come in again ! She would like to beg his pardon ; yet she hardly dared. He would ask for an explanation. Tell the truth of course she could not ; make more false ex-

cuses she would not ; to be sullen, and to refuse to reply would be just as bad ; and yet she felt happier than she had for some time past.

She went out to meet Ruby on the stairs.

"See if Mr. John Marshall has gone. If not, you must ask him to have lunch. I sha'n't come down."

"Why not ?"

"Go and see," Georgie reiterated ; and Ruby obeyed, and kicked open the drawing-room door.

"All serene ! coast's all clear," he called out.

And Georgie went back to her room and shut the door again. Ruby unceremoniously followed, with the faintest formula of a tap.

Georgie was standing in the middle of the room, looking as cross as two sticks. Ruby was only eighteen, but he wasn't "born yesterday." He saw what was the row at once.

"Come down, and don't fret yourself, Georgie. I suppose Jack has been playing the common fool, as well as Clara Vane." But Ruby did not yet understand Jack's confusion of persons.

Georgie laughed, and said,

"I am glad he is gone. I was alone, and they showed him in. He talked such nonsense about this horrid *bal masqué* that I had to go away."

"So he can play at hide-and-seek as well as Clara Vane," said Ruby, as he saw through the plot. "They're a nice pair, aint they ? Come on down stairs. I'd never have spoken to you again if you hadn't sent him about his business." And they went down to the dining-room arm-in-arm like a couple of schoolboys.

Colonel Warren came in about half-past three. He turned into his den to write against time ; so Georgie let him alone, and postponed her confession till the evening. Still Jemmy did not show his face.

There was a front-door ring, which must be Jemmy, she thought ; but a strange voice sounded in the hall, and she stole out of the drawing-room, in no mood to face visitors.

But she ran no risk of intrusion. The visitor had been foiled once before in attempting to come to the point ; and diffident of his oratory, if not of his merits, he went this time straight to the fountain-head, and asked for Colonel Warren.

The colonel was in his study. Better luck, anyhow, this time ; and the visitor screwed up his nerves to beard the colonel in his den.

“Show him into the drawing-room,” said the colonel to the butler, for he was up to his eyes in work.

“He asks particularly to see you, Sir.” And the colonel laid down his pen in resignation.

“How d’ye do, Paget?” said the colonel, rising, the pink of courtesy and affability, though the visit would probably entail a special messenger to make up for the lost post.

“I hope I see you well, Colonel Warren,” said Algeron with suavity ; and the colonel, having responded in the affirmative and reciprocated the good wish, wondered whether that was all that had been the object of the interruption.

“I have come to talk to you upon rather—I may say, upon a very delicate question,” said Paget, as he stood on the hearth-rug and fronted the colonel.

"Pray sit down, Paget," said the colonel, drawing the proffered but unnoticed fauteuil nearer to his guest's shins, and wondering whether it was a club-fracas and the etiquette relevant thereto upon which Paget had come to consult him.

Paget sat down, put his hat on his knees, then on the floor, then on his knees again, and finally, in exaggeration of the colonel's suggestion, set it on the writing-table, upon a wet sheet of writing-paper.

"Ten minutes' work wasted!" thought the colonel, as he calculated the effects of the smear; but he did not mind, and looked just as courteous as before.

Paget pulled his remaining glove off, paired it neatly with the fellow, took breath, leant forward, screwed his moustache-tips, looked the colonel full in the face, and blurted out:

"I want to marry your daughter."

"Hey!" said the colonel, nonchalance personified.

"Your daughter—Miss Warren—Georgie!"

"I know nothing about it, my dear Paget," said the colonel, utterly astonished, but cool as a cucumber.

"There are two sides of course to such a question. This is the first intimation I have had of this proposal of yours."

"I thought it my duty to see you, Sir, as soon as possible," said Paget humbly.

"Quite so; very straightforward of you; but what does the young lady herself say to you upon the subject?"

"Of course, I cannot exactly say, Colonel Warren," said Algernon, gaining courage; "but I have reason to hope that I am not altogether a matter of indifference to her."

"You have never, then, definitely asked her the question?" said the colonel precisely.

"Not exactly," said Algernon, who remembered his interruption and failure on his return from Weldover; "but, as I said before, I think I have sounded her; I mean, you know, that we have always got on remarkably well together."

"Well," said the colonel, who had certainly noticed no *empressement* of manner at dinner on the Saturday, but was aware at the same time how much his daughter had been out of range of himself during late months, "as far as I myself am concerned, I have, and, as you know, always have had, a high opinion of yourself. The case rests entirely with my daughter; I shall not influence her in the slightest degree either way. She is full young to make up her mind for life like this; but the engagement, if it comes to any, may well stand over for a year;" and he reached his hand to the bell-pull.

"I thank you much, Colonel Warren, for the kind way in which you have received me upon this subject;" and Paget, felicitated beyond his best expectations at the smooth going which he had encountered, made a most dutiful obeisance.

"Ask Miss Warren if she will come down here to me in about five minutes," said the colonel to the domestic who answered the bell. Then turning to Paget:

"I have not touched upon financial matters, Paget, in any way, because I am not aware that you have ever lived extravagantly, or gone too fast, or done anything to encumber your property. For my own part, I, of course, am prepared to make a handsome settlement upon my

daughter whenever she may marry anyone of whom I fully approve."

Paget bowed lower than before, in acquiescence and in recognition of the implied compliment.

"I sent for my daughter to come here, not being sure that she would be alone in the drawing-room; if she sends word that she can come, I will leave you alone for a quarter of an hour to talk it over without me;" and the colonel composedly and magnanimously prepared to resign all hopes of completing his correspondence for that day.

"Miss Warren has just gone out walking with Master Charles Blake," was the message from a time-honoured butler, who could never be persuaded to recognise Ruby's years, or ignore his nursery title.

"I am sorry to keep you in suspense, Paget," said the colonel courteously but hardly candidly; for he was delighted to get back to his letters before post-time; and on second thoughts, was better pleased to have an opportunity of talking over Paget's mission privately with his pet child before the latter had had his final say.

So Paget rose to bid adieu, and hoped to be allowed to call early next day.

"By all means," said the colonel. "I think Georgie always makes a point of going to morning service during this Passion-week; and I accompany her if I have time; but you will be safe to find her in soon after midday. Come and lunch with us." And Paget departed, soaring in the third heaven of felicitation.

Colonel Warren sat down again, and wrote forty miles an hour to make up for lost time, and restrained his im-

patience when he heard Georgie and Ruby reënter, and pass his door.

At 6.25 he sealed his last missive, and sent a flunkey to carry it to the post-office. Then he went into the drawing-room.

Georgie was teaching Ruby how to manipulate a Czerny's exercise. Ruby was ambitious, and insisted in going direct to the Sultan's polka. The teacher was contemptuous and the pupil self-willed.

"Come and talk to me for five minutes, will you, Georgie?" said the colonel.

"Keep your thumb down to the end of the bar, and don't try to go too fast at first," was her last admonition; and she rose to go to her father, who put his arm round her and led her down stairs.

Georgie understood what was coming. The colonel, though idolising and affectionate, was seldom so demonstrative, except for the standard morning and evening caress. So they entered the study and closed the door.

"Georgie," said the colonel, "I had a visitor here just now."

"Did you?" said Georgie, feeling guilty, she hardly knew why.

"Who came to obtain my sanction, before going any further, in asking your hand of yourself in person," continued the colonel in an affectionate though matter-of-fact tone, as he held Georgie in one arm and stroked her hair with the other hand.

"And what did you say, papa?" she almost whispered after a pause.

"I told him that the thing lay with yourself; that he

must see you himself to-morrow morning," said the colonel, wondering why she had not first asked the name of the visitor.

"It's too bad of him, papa!" she exclaimed, looking up, perfectly scarlet in face and neck. "He came bothering me this morning, and I told him he had made a mistake altogether."

"He came this morning, do you say, my child?" asked the colonel in utter astonishment.

"It's a long story," said Georgie, collecting herself. "He must have mistaken Clara Vane for me at the *bal masqué* at Weldover, and talked some nonsense to her, so I can guess; then he comes here and wants to know why you and I have not written to him all this time. As soon as I found out what he meant, I told him he was talking nonsense, and if he wanted some lunch he must wait till Ruby came in. So I ran away at once; and now he comes bothering again!" And Georgie stamped her foot, and looked up again piteously cross.

"So you sent Master Paget about his business!" said the colonel, angrily amused. "Well, you have saved me the trouble, darling. He need not have gone out of his way to tell me such a fib that he had never proposed, but that he had found out that you were not indifferent to him!" And the colonel chafed at the idea of duplicity.

"Paget! Mr. Paget! I was speaking of Mr. John Marshall, papa!" and Georgie flushed up again in sheer bewilderment.

"So *he* has been here too?" exclaimed the colonel, seeing the plot thickening. "And you did not come to tell me till now?" he added half reproachfully.



"You were out at first ; and then you were so busy writing, I meant to wait till after dinner," said Georgie pleadingly.

"Very well," said the colonel, and sealed forgiveness with a kiss. "But Algernon Paget—he has never spoken to you like this, has he?"

"Certainly not, papa," said Georgie promptly ; and in an ominous tone.

"And what am I to say to him?" asked the colonel, who had noticed the tone of the last speech.

"Tell him not to come near me," was the decisive reply ; and Georgie again hid her face on her father's shoulder.

"Very well, my darling," said the colonel, rather opening his eyes at this very peremptory conclusion, so opposed to what Paget's self-gratulations had at first led him to anticipate. Then as he bent tenderly over her he continued : "You are your own mistress, Georgie, in everything ; you know that by now ; do just as you please. I do not think we have any concealments from each other, and I hope we never shall;" and then, as he felt her heart beating with something almost like a palpitation, he placed her in his chair, and said : "Sit still a second, darling, and then go and keep quiet till dinner-time ; and looking round for a water croft poured out a glass, which Georgie declined. Then she rose at once, kissed the colonel in a faltering manner, and left him.

The colonel's last speech had stung her conscience to the quick about the scene in Rotten Row in June last. But it was too late now, and she could not betray Jemmy. Jemmy was not everyone—he was one of the family ; and

she sat down at her bed-room window and gazed below at the lamp-light; but she was past crying, and astonished at her own self-possession.

And the colonel pondered to himself as he subducted his coat-tails, from force of habit, over an empty fireplace.

“It sounds as if something else was up; who can it be?” as he masticated his grizzled moustache. “That golden baby Ruby? Impossible; he’s a year the younger, and she is the thorough elder sister. Can’t see it anyhow.” And the colonel sent a line to the pillar-post to tell Paget of the failure of his suit, and vowed to keep his eyes open at Ruby and Georgie that evening.





## CHAPTER XXXIII.

MAKE AN AFFIRMATIVE.



GEORGIE WARREN had vowed to herself the necessity of an apology to Jemmy for her unceremonious exit in the morning ; but it was hard enough and awkward enough to have to do on any conditions, at any time and place, and she at least could wait her opportunity, and own her contrition unobserved by any third person.

And Jemmy, moreover, ignorant that Ruby had elucidated the mystery with Georgie, and eager to explain everything and clear his own character, came into Eaton-place only in time to scramble into dress-clothes and keep the soup waiting till it was tepid.

So he and Georgie glanced across the table like strange dogs, and sat in the drawing-room like a pair of sulky children from the nursery, till prayers were announced at 10 P.M.

Ruby, who was always game to go to bed when he

was bored with his own company, and could make nothing out of anybody else, had sneaked up stairs before the hour for family worship had been announced; and the colonel, still in arrears of correspondence, abjured a return to picquet with Jemmy, shook himself together, and prepared for a scribbling match with the small hours.

So Jemmy looked round for Georgie when the servants had left the room, and finding that she had disappeared after Colonel Warren, lay back moodily in one arm-chair and slung his legs over the back of another. In a few minutes his head was bobbing in a most uncomfortable nap. Georgie had been to confer with Ruby, found him locked in his room half asleep, and was told through the door "not to bother."

By saying good-night to the colonel in his den, she ascertained that Jemmy, if in the drawing-room still, was safely alone, so she came back to clear her conscience before she went to bed.

It was an awkward commencement to find Jemmy in such an inelegant attitude—his head bobbing, and he snoring convulsively; she was just going to back out of it and procrastinate, when the rustle of her dress roused him, and he looked up, and said stupidly, "Halloo!"

"It's only me," said Georgie ungrammatically.

"Come here, child," said Jemmy, sitting up, wider awake.

So she came and stood in front of him, as Jemmy, having summoned her, scratched his head, and did not exactly know how to begin.

Georgie penitently led off for him.

"I beg your pardon, Jemmy, for leaving the room in

that rude way this morning. Are you very angry with me ? ”

Jemmy held out his hand in reply, which closed on Georgie's, and he then said drily,

“ Were you so very much scandalised at the idea of my cruelly jilting Clara Vane ? ”

“ I don't know,” said Georgie, trying to be candid yet self-possessed.

“ I must explain the whole thing to you, in justice to myself, Georgie ; it was a blunder from that *bal masqué* —— ”

“ Ruby has told me the whole story,” she interrupted, anxious to break off a narration which must detail, or at least infer, Jack Marshall's odious preference for herself, “ and I am so sorry, Jemmy ; ” and she looked down pleadingly.

Jemmy was merciless.

“ I hoped that you would have taken my part, anyhow, even if there had been fifty Clara Vanes in the case. I did not know that she was such a friend of yours,” he said reproachfully, and with a dash of sarcasm.

“ No more she is ! ” said Georgie vehemently, and this time in perfect candour, as she spoke for herself.

“ And yet you were angry with me for her sake ? ” said Jemmy quietly, still pressing the point.

George was silent. Jemmy was still holding her hand in his left.

“ What do you say ? ” asked Jemmy pertinaciously.

“ No ! ” said Georgie shortly, and looking away from him.

“ You weren't angry with me ? ”

"I couldn't help it, Jemmy; don't be so unkind;" and she tried to take her hand away.

Jemmy kept his hold, and went on with his cross-examination.

"So you *were* angry with me, then? Just so; you took her part against me! Well, I can't help it, can I?"

"I didn't. I wouldn't do anything of the sort. I hate her—there! you know that;" and Georgie's flushed face was a picture, as she looked round the room away from Jemmy.

"Then what on earth made you so angry with me? You need not be cross like that for nothing, Georgie;" and Jemmy in a reproachful tone still harped on the old string.

"I said I could not help it; I told you so. I won't do it again. Let me go."

Jemmy took a tack nearer to the wind.

"Then you will never prefer her to me again, Georgie?" in a softer, kinder tone than the reproachful banter hitherto.

"No;" and Georgie was crying fast.

"Nor anyone?" he continued, and there was no answer, only a couple of tears pat, pat, on his fingers.

Jemmy did not know how long he paused before he again spoke, and said in a different tone from any before,

"Georgie, child, tell me one thing—which am I, uncle or cousin?"

The latter fanciful definition of Jemmy's distant relationship had never been used but by Georgie herself, in Rotten Row ten months ago. The term could not but bring back the scene, and ideas with it. Georgie only

looked down and drew breath hard; she had ceased crying.

"Which is it to be?" said Jemmy very gently, looking full at her.

Georgie for an instant raised her eyes and looked down full at him, then on the floor again, and made no reply; but her lower lip was quivering, and Jemmy could feel the pulse going, and he had his answer.

He took the other hand in his as he rose up and stood close and full in front of her, and bending down a little said,

"I haven't asked you for a kiss for nearly six years; will you give me one now?"

Georgie drew herself up for an instant and looked Jemmy full in the face; then as his eyes met hers, she bent her head once more and submitted to her fate. And Mr. Blake got not one but many a kiss as his recompense before that interview was over.

They would have talked on to the small hours of past fears and future hopes had not the booming chime of the great ormolu stair-clock, sonorous in the stillness, recalled Mr. Blake to the realities of outer life and civilisation.

So he secured one more kiss, and sent Georgie off fluttering to her nest. Then he stuck his hands in his tail-pockets, chewed the end of his whiskers, and sauntered down leisurely to the colonel's den.

"Come in," said the colonel. "You, Jemmy, is it? I thought everyone was in bed an hour ago."

Jemmy stood on the rug and subducted his tails under the genial warmth of the fire, for the evening struck chilly.

Colonel Warren scribbled away, paying no attention to Jemmy, who apparently had only looked in from sheer idleness and indolence.

"There's the *Pall Mall*," said he in a minute, as Jemmy stood motionless on the rug.

"Thank you," said Jemmy, and he held it in front of him, upside down, to qualify for occupation.

The colonel finished his document and put it in an envelope.

Jemmy cleared his throat and laid down the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

"If I am your second cousin, what relation would the two make if I became your son-in-law?"

"God bless my soul!" said Colonel Warren, and laid down his pen to see if Jemmy looked fuddled or top-heavy.

Jemmy looked remarkably intelligent for him.

"Well!" said he.

"Are you joking, Jemmy?"

"No," said Jemmy; "are you?"

"Well, I should never have thought it, I must say."

"That I wasn't joking?" asked Jemmy blandly, in no way offended.

"That you should have taken such an idea into your head at your time of life."

"Is there any objection?"

"Not a bit, my good friend, as far as I am concerned; but you're so mortal old."

"Hey!" said Jemmy, whose mind and manners made him often seem older than his years.

"You're a dozen years older than Georgie."



"Only eleven," said Jemmy quickly.

"Well, eleven then," said the colonel, laughing.

"What odds do eleven years make when we come to threescore and ten? and if we don't live so long, let's enjoy life and each other while we can."

"But what does Georgie say?" asked the colonel.

"She says yes."

"Then so do I, and God bless you!" and the colonel rose up and gripped Jemmy's honest palm with his right, while he rubbed the knuckles of his left in his eyelashes.

Then they looked at each other a minute.

"How long have you thought of this, Jemmy, if it's not a rude question?"

"Nearly a year," said Jemmy candidly.

"And when did you settle it between you?"

"Since prayers to-night."

"By Jove! well, it explains one thing that I could not make out before, though I should never have laid it to you."

"What was that?"

"I have had Jack Marshall and Algy Paget both here on the same errand to-day."

"Well?" said Jemmy.

"Georgie sent them both about their business."

"Well?" repeated Jemmy.

"Georgie's manner, when she told me she would not speak to them, struck me as curious, and I could not quite make it out; I fancied there was something further behind the scenes; but I must say I never suspected you."

"Oh!" said Jemmy, in a satisfied tone.

"I looked upon you as a spare governor, after myself," continued the colonel.

"So did I for some time," said Jemmy; "but I got too fond to keep my proper place;" and he laughed at himself and the Rotten-row scene.

"Well, there will be lots to talk over to-morrow," said the colonel. "You don't go down to the Old Vale immediately, do you?"

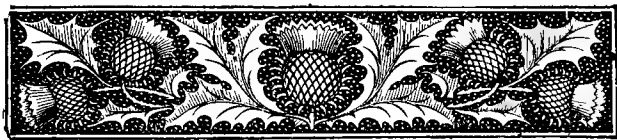
"Not till the 8.10 evening train. I have to be at Cross Coppice Wednesday morning. I'll come up again after hunting. We don't go out Good Friday, of course."

"Do, by all means. Knife and fork always ready for you, and nobody shall touch your room;" and the colonel could not resist a yawn; he was by no means game to go back to correspondence.

"Good-night," said Jemmy. "How much longer do you sit up?"

"I'm done for the night. I have plenty to think about without more writing;" and the colonel took his bed-candle and followed Jemmy aloft.

James Blake, man of the world though he was, somehow still adhered strictly to his private evening devotions; even if they too often degenerated to mere formulæ, he had never missed or forgotten them, such as they were, since he learnt others more primitive at his mother's knee. Perhaps they came back with more force than ever to him this night, when he coined to himself, in simple, yet humble and reverent words, a new petition that was not for *all* conditions of men.



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### JACK MARSHALL SIMPLIFIES MATTERS.

**S**IR JOHN and Lady Marshall came up in May to their town-house. Jack made what use he liked of the house, but preferred the independence of lodgings in Mayfair when there was nothing particular going on at home.

When he wanted a variety one morning he turned in to lunch with his sisters.

"There's a note for you, to be forwarded, from the Vanes," said Blanche, when she met him in the dining-room. "I suppose it's for dinner on Tuesday week, the same as one that came with it to mamma ; it's very rude of you, Jack, not to have called there all this time."

"I did not know that they were in town," said Jack passively.

Since he had heard of Georgie's engagement he had settled into a chronic melancholy, which his sisters nominally and good-naturedly considered as the natural

reaction to such a lover of sport as Jack, after the lapse of the hunting-season and its attractions.

"How long have they been up there?" asked Jack, as he held out his hand for the note which Blanche had just fetched for him: "and where do they hang out?"

"They have taken 17 Lowndes-street for the season."

"Eh?" said Jack slowly, and looking scared as a rabbit. "*What* number?"

"No. 17. Open your letter; I dare say you will find the address inside. Go and do your duty some day this week, like a good boy."

Jack read his letter in silence.

"Oh my!" was all he said when he had finished, and sat down in an arm-chair to contemplate upon his best line of action.

"What's the matter, Jack?" asked Kate Marshall; "isn't it an invitation, same as ours?"

"Oh, yes; it's a rubbishy invitation;" and he tossed the pink perfumed note over to her.

"Well, and are you engaged that day?"

"No; I aint that I know of;" and Jack screwed his moustache, and then scratched his back-hair in deep deliberation.

"Then, will you go with us, like a good boy?"

"Yes—I don't know—perhaps I'll go with you. We'll see about it;" and Jack took a wing of duckling to keep mind and body going, and expedited matters still further with a tumbler of claret.

Then he went back to his rooms in Bolton-row, and discussed many prime cigars till 5 P.M. After which, as

the season was still early, and days not yet fully lengthened, he sent round for his horse from the mews at the back, and proceeded to attire himself scrupulously. To avoid the pang of meeting with Miss Warren in Drive or Row, he had exiled himself from the park at proper hours during his fortnight's stay in town, but had oftentimes gone there, ere the crowds collected, to smoke the early morning weed of contemplation, and dilate to himself upon the folly of young women marrying old fools ten years their seniors.

This afternoon, however, he seemed averse to conversion as he turned his horse's head up Curzon-street to Hamilton-place.

His unquiet spirit had not prompted him to ride for many days past, and the handsome iron-gray hack exuberantly bucked, kicked, and squeaked as he ambled up the pavement. Jack saved himself with a judicious prop from the pommel, and hesitated whether he should not return and send the horse first for an hour's walking exercise with his groom; but the rude suggestion of a small butcher's cad, glancing from under his meat-tray, "that the genelman would be safer inside," put Jack upon his mettle, and determined him to face and fight the danger out. So he held bravely on, and reached the gates in safety. He would run no risks just yet by going out of a walk till he was more sure of the iron-gray's temperament and good behaviour. So in less than ten minutes he passed down the Row, opposite the entrance from Rutland-gate, and, as if a coincidence to spite and unsettle him, the only two equestrians at that instant entering the Ride from that direction were Georgie

Warren and Jemmy Blake, deep in the sweetest of converse.

There was no backing out of it, and as they crossed, half behind him, Jemmy gave the most cordial of nods, Georgie the most courteous of bows; and Jack had nothing for it but to doff his beaver in recognition, to the disapproval of the iron-gray, who shied at the black object waving over his head, and plunged viciously in resentment for the liberty taken. Jack's bridle-hand was all he could spare to prop himself as he endeavoured to replace the hat, and the slackened rein, as the hand dropped convulsively upon the tree of the saddle, encouraged the gray to take a final kick and fling, and then set off at score up the slope, and towards Queen's-gate. Georgie and Jemmy had turned up towards the Corner, and so hardly noticed the mischief they had occasioned; but a couple of mounted police jogged on in Jack's track to secure his name and address for furious riding.

Jack managed to get more of an "upper" hand, with elbows squared, and reins well up to his collar, by the time he was opposite Prince's-gate, and having so far seen nothing of the object of his search, and noting the narrow continuation of the Row beyond to all intents and purposes a blank, turned to the right, off the Row, and jogged towards the Serpentine-bridge.

Nothing could be simpler: as he got into the new ride beyond the guard-house and made on towards Hyde-park-corner, straight in front of him rode up Clara Vane, and as they had not seen each other since she left Ashton Grove, the day after Lady Kenilworth's *bal masqué*, the greeting could not but be pointed and friendly.

The longer stretch of riding-ground lay in the direction in which Jack was going. Nothing easier or more sensible than for Clara to acquiesce and come round the park that way with him.

"I suppose you have heard the news, that Jemmy Blake is going to be married," said Jack presently, by way of a feeler, ignoring Georgie's name in the affair, as a sore point; and at the same time praying inwardly that whatever conclusion Clara Vane might have formed of the strange inconstancy of her cavalier that night at Weldover, she at least had no suspicion as to who was the culprit.

"Oh, yes; I heard all about Georgie, long ago," was Clara's reply, sinking for similar reasons Jemmy Blake's identity, and on thorns lest Jack should have ever discovered who had been the confidante of his heart's overflowing at that ill-fated *bal masqué*.

For Clara had heard of Jemmy's repudiation in full detail from her condolent father, and though she preserved her own counsel in further discourses to herself, she had not far to go to guess who else besides Jemmy was driving in a dog-cart and running about electioneering that New-year's Eve.

"When was it first thought of, do you know?" asked Jack.

"I really don't know;" and Clara underwent an almost novel sensation, as she felt herself flushing up to the roots of her hair, as she called to mind the parallel idea from the Old Vale in reference to herself; but she was close veiled, she remembered a second later, and Jack could not notice the change of complexion. So she

shook her wits together, cast her tongue loose, and rattled off like her old self on various topics as they slowly went up the Ride towards the Marble Arch.

When they reached it, as a matter of course, it was no use rattling along the hard drive down to Hyde-park-corner, so they would go back the way they had come, and thus get as little macadamisation as possible before they regained the Row.

Clara must needs canter down the Ride to Victoria-gate, and the iron-gray giving an exuberant kick and squeak as he set off, did not succeed in completely shunting Jack, but so fully employed his hands upon the saddle, that there was no aid left to save his tottering beaver, which rolled unmolested into the newly-watered slush under foot.

Jack fully appreciated the luxury of Clara's groom to pick it up for him, and registered a vow that if he rode that brute again he, too, would employ a groom, to make himself generally useful on his own account.

So they strolled about the rides till it was close on dinner-hours, and then Jack turned with Clara through Rutland-gate to accompany her home, and make sure of knowing the house in Lowndes-square for the future.

He had not screwed up his courage to speak to the point during the ride; mind and body are too closely bound up for the one to do itself justice when the other is ill at ease. The student who attempts to read from an arm-chair finds his capacity and memory enervated in proportion to the indolence of his frame; and in like manner a weary body will fetter the action of a mind that may have been lying fallow all day. How, then,



could Jack have collected his energies and planned his *coup-de-main*, or subtle siege, as the case might be, while the iron-gray was fretting and bucking in such an unjustifiable way, and Jack's main energies were devoted between snatches of conversation to preserving his equilibrium of body, as an absolute essential to that of the mind.

As well expect a swain to tell his tale of sorrow and hope when seated on the pinnacles of a thorn-bush, or when *éventré* by the uncompromising irregularity of motion of a Channel steamer in a sou' wester. "No!" thought Jack, as he reached Lowndes-square, "a place for everything, and everything in its place; the drawing-room 'inviting repose and screened from vulgar gaze' is a fitter sphere for ethereal conversation than the vacillating inequalities of the pigskin, a body ill at rest as the anxious mind, and the *tout-ensemble* the cynosure of idle and curious gaze."

So Jack bided his time, and Clara, who had rapidly come to the conclusion that Jack, if not so bright and attractive as honest Jemmy Blake, was at least heir to a baronetcy and twenty thousand a-year, when Sir John should "go aloft," and was, moreover, to say the least, an old and valued acquaintance, though often hitherto ruthlessly snubbed while better game was on the wing, thought it could do no harm to lend a hand to the charm which seemed so spontaneously and rapidly to have begun to work, and as the moment came to bid adieu, she tenderly expressed her hopes that Jack was going to accept the invitation sent overnight.

Of course Jack was; but he was going to call before

then. He had not known till then the address of the house in town, and Clara, on thorns, noticed his confusion as his last unguarded speech called painful reminiscences to his heart.

She hastened to change the subject. "How had the music been getting on lately?"

'To tell the truth, Jack's heart had been too full to sing, or even to think about it, for some time past; but Jack did not tell the truth at all; he said, "Oh, very nicely, thank you. I have a new song just bought yesterday" (a frightful fib; but Jack improvised and went in for a bold stroke), "and I think the accompaniment is beyond Blanche" (still worse, for Blanche was a first-class performer compared to the thumping, hammering Clara). "Will you learn it for me?" and Jack was half-startled at his own audacity.

Clara was as cool as a cucumber. Of course she would do anything she could to oblige him; he over-rated her powers as a pianiste, but she would do her best.

"I'll bring it to-morrow if you'll let me, at twelve, and we can learn it in time for your dinner-party," said Jack, bold as a lion when met half-way, with such plain-sailing before him; and it would not do to chatter any longer in the doorway, so he took his farewell for the day.

But Jack did not let the grass grow under his feet; he would be married now before Georgie Warren, just to spite her. He consulted the foreman at Chappell's for a new song next morning, and was true as love itself to the hour of midday at No. 17.

Clara was all ready for him; she had a trump-card in

her hand after all ; and what fun if Georgie, as she was sure to do, sent to ask her to be a bridesmaid and she should reply that she was better engaged already ! There was as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.

So Jack produced his music, and they set to work. It was pretty plain that nothing much could be done that morning ; Clara was, to say the least, slowish in playing from notes, but would, after a failure or two had made her half-ashamed of her incompetence, take care to learn it well up for Jack by to-morrow, or any other day he liked.

Jack was glad enough of the respite, for he had never seen or heard of the thing till it was unfolded on the piano ; and Clara's quick eye had caught the publisher's stamp upon the paper that enfolded the music, telling her plainly that the piece was fresh from the shop, and guessed, yet amply appreciated and forgave, the fib that had been perpetrated for her sake.

So Jack gave up the song as a bad job, and sitting down on a spare music-stool scratched his head for a second and then said,

“ Don't you think we could manage a duet together ? ”

“ I dare say we could,” said Clara ; “ anyhow, we can try.”

“ Well, I don't know about trials ; we ought to settle it somehow. Should we keep good harmony, do you think ? ”

“ I hope so ; I would do my best,” said Clara, “ for my part.”

“ Then let's get married before Georgie and Jemmy Blake ! ” and Jack crossed the Rubicon with a bound.

"Bless me, Mr. Marshall!" said Clara, utterly taken aback. Though fully prepared for the idea, and ready to entertain it when duly laid before her, she had not given Jack Marshall credit for the only *double entendre* he had ever perpetrated, and which, to do him justice, was only adapted to circumstances when he was already half-way through it.

Jack was more the conqueror than the subdued petitioner that had so bungled matters at Weldover and in Eaton-place.

Clara's self-possession was not far distant; she only waited for a further word from Jack.

"You will, won't you, dearest?" said he, in the most matter-of-fact manner.

Of course the admirable downcast look of embarrassment, soft pleading glance again raised to his face, and inaudibly-murmured yet palpable reply, entitled him to draw his music-stool within range and cement matters with a thoroughly-loyal kiss.

"*Veni, vidi, vici*," thought Jack to himself; "none but the brave deserve the fair." And yet, as he bent him home again after lunch, only to return and dress for a *tête-à-tête* dinner with father and daughter, even his philosophy hazarded the comparison between the sweetness of stolen waters and of over-ripe falling fruit.

"Never mind," said Jack in self-consolation, as he counted on his fingers; "fine young woman, handsome certainly, highly accomplished, good settlement, goodish temper" (which was true), "and governor M.P.; not half bad all round—doosed nearly equivalent to what I myself bring into the concern."



## CHAPTER XXXV.

### RESIGNATION.

**ONE** more sketch before the curtain falls, when, on the Monday after the Derby-day, Mr. James Blake, M.P., of Vale House, took the chair in the grand saloon of the Golden Cross, Ashton, on the occasion of the annual dinner of the members of the O.V.H.

As the local papers would say on the following Saturday, "the *cuisine* was excellent, and the wines of the most *recherché* description;" so at least the majority of the *convives* that evening seemed to imply, in deed if not in word. Even *bon vivants* like the master, Sir John, and Algy Paget made the champagne perfectly passable with a judicious admixture in soda-water tumblers of unlimited ice, and the smallest modicum of seltzer-water just to kill the fizz of the exhilarating fluid. And the thirst of even that sultry evening seemed in a fair way to be liberally, if not altogether judiciously, quenched when,

on the withdrawal of the cloth, and the completion, with due justice, of the usual loyal and patriotic toasts, the M.F.H., faced by Sir J. Marshall, flanked by Ned Masters, Paget, Major Crawley, Captain Winthrop, Major White, Jack Marshall, the Rev. H. Craven, and a score or two of other well-known faces, to say nothing of Ralph and Ruby, once more rose to his feet, and, after a thunder of applause that kept him mercilessly standing and perspiring for another five minutes, obtained at last a cordial and patient hearing, as he proceeded to detail in a business-like way the performances of the past season: how that no less than sixty brace of cubs and foxes had been duly accounted for; that the committee had given him the most kind and cordial support; that the working force of the kennel comprised forty-two couples of working hounds, besides young entries and parent stock; that proprietors frankly gave him every support in preservation of foxes, and aid and hospitality when drawing distant covers; that he had but few complaints of trampled wheat or rifled henroost; and wished, for the sake of sport, that brother M.F.H.'s could meet with such support and coöperation from farmers and neighbours; and that with the reminiscences of, to him, a most pleasant season, and to his friends he hoped not a disappointing one, he still hoped to hear of even better doings in future years, and would call on all *collaborateurs* in the noble science to join him in a toast of three times three for the O.V.H.

“Point! left! blank! one! two! three!” Of course the fire was hearty and furious, and on the whole but a small percentage of crockery was sacrificed, for the even-

ing was still young. Nothing could exceed the enthusiasm of the self-congratulatory toasts which all had drunk to themselves and each other, till Sir John Marshall rose ponderously to his legs, and after mopping his face thrice while he waited for a hearing, proceeded to give his friends what they would allow with him to be one of the most welcome toasts it had ever been his lot to propose.

They had enjoyed, as all good goers of the Old Vale knew, a season of most unexceptionable sport—had been met by the head of affairs in all points with the utmost courtesy and cordiality; and the only clause that could at the close cast a damp upon the enjoyment of the last seven months was that, just as they had settled nicely down, they found that they had from unforeseen, yet he could not call them unfortunate, circumstances,—for all would join in earnest congratulation upon them,—to lose the ruler that they had lately so auspiciously obtained. They would join him, he was sure, in a hearty Old-Vale fire and three times three for their master, Mr. James Blake; thank him for the past, congratulate him upon the present, and wish him well for his future parliamentary career, and in the state of life to which he was shortly to change himself; and add most especially an extra cheer for the future Mrs. J. B.

And when Sir John had once more resumed his seat, and mopped excitement from his face and sympathy from his eye-lashes, the crash of welcome and congratulation to the M.F.H. forbade any attempt to get upon his legs for at least another ten minutes. But at last throats got husky under expression of feeling, glasses were once

more plied to their legitimate use, rather than to the subservience of kicking up a clatter of applause, order was gradually restored, and James Blake, Esq., M.P., rose and said, in his old quiet dry manner, warming and expanding as he proceeded,

“It is too true, gentlemen, that I am compelled to leave you and give up my employment among you as master of the hunt. Though that topic was the last in order of Sir John Marshall’s kind and flattering eulogy upon myself, I cannot but come to it first; for as I look round on you, it is the heaviest thought and only pang of all.”

And Jemmy spoke so quietly and yet so simply, that they listened to him like schoolboys; refrained from interruptions and interpolations of applause, and only bottled their enthusiasm for a more forcible flash when he should again subside into his seat.

And Jemmy continued :

“It would be needless to say how thoroughly I have enjoyed my sojourn among you; how fully I have appreciated your cordiality and coöperation; and how thankful I am if I have by my endeavours in any way promoted the interests of sport, and conduced to the pleasure of all of you.

“That I have so soon to resign my office among you is not my fault—yet still less can I call it my misfortune. You will all agree with me that with the duties of married life and the cares of representation of my constituency in the Lower House, I should, in all probability, be no longer able to do that full justice to the O.V.H. which I should aspire to, and you all would deserve.



"That I have so far been fortunate in meriting your approval is, I believe, because our system of management is strictly analogous to what I hold as my creed in politics—a monarchy unfettered in administration, backed by a chamber of reserve and a provisional government.

"After all, I am, I trust, only changing my service with you, and taking office for you in public cares of church and state, instead of field-sports; and from all that I hear, and that the committee have so kindly arranged, the horn and hounds will still be held in the family—in the hands of one whom you know, and who fully appreciates you; and I trust that my cousin, Mr. Romilly, may in his turn enjoy his office and your confidence as thoroughly as, I trust, I myself have done.

"And though my own horn will be no longer at my saddle, my hand will often, and my heart shall always, be with you. I do not mean, if I can help it, to quit a neighbourhood where good sport and good fellowship are such synonymous terms; and while I can no longer greet you all as master, I trust you will none the less welcome me as mate.

"And, to conclude, for the kind and hearty way in which you, Sir John, have proposed, and you all have received, the health and happiness of my future bride and myself, I cannot fairly express my thanks, lest I should collapse and fail in the effort. You know me well enough to understand all I feel, and all that I would say if I could. You will forgive me if I simply conclude by saying to you all in its fullest, and therefore its simplest, sense, thank you!"

And Mr. James Blake resumed his seat as quietly as he had left it.

What with other toasts to follow, *imprimis*, of the new master, Mr. Ralph Romilly; then of the committee, coupled with Sir John Marshall; the ladies, coupled with Ruby; and other minor ones at the tail end, it was the wrong side of midnight ere Jemmy Blake reached his den in the Vale House, no longer a crowned head, his sceptre passed to the grasp of Ralph Romilly, who bullied him to sit up over a weed, till Jemmy fairly sank asleep in his arm-chair, his havannah extinct, and hanging listlessly between his jaws.

"Never mind, old boy!" said Ralph, when he had flung down at last the burnt end of his own weed, and shaken Jemmy back to consciousness of the necessity of crawling to bed before dawn. "You may as well have a fling while you can, in the last days of your bachelorhood. You'll have your pipe put out before a fortnight is over;" and he patted Jemmy condolently on the back.

"I don't think Georgie will do anything of the sort; besides, I never touch anything but a decent weed. I hate pipes," said Jemmy in the most literal and dreamy manner; and he groaned helplessly the whole way up to his bed-room; yet before 6 A.M. he was cooling his brow and bracing his nerves far out in the rippling waters of the Vale-House lake, as he lay down on his shoulder and cut his path in the most approved side-stroke across the reach to explore dabchicks' nests on a distant islet.

Then he came back rosy and hungry, and revenged himself by an administration of cold pig to the still slum-

bering Ralph, who contemptuously remarked at breakfast-time that Jemmy was lapsing into second childhood since his engagement, and if he must needs be so exuberant, had better go back to school with Ruby for a term or two.

That same afternoon the cousins went back to town.

Jemmy had insisted on being married before the London season had run itself out; there was no fun in a lot of dancing and foolery when one had better things to talk about; and though the last month of the Opera would be sacrificed, still he could not eat his cake and have it; and it would be more enjoyable to secure a honeymoon tour before the Long Vacation had commenced, and emancipated cockneys of all denominations flocked wholesale into the nooks and corners of Old England.

So he set up a pair—chestnut and iron-gray—to his tea-cart phaeton, and, persuading Georgie to dispense with the encumbrance of a bower-maiden till she should return and settle down in her new home, sent the phaeton and pair down to Llangollen on June 12th in charge of Peter Mell, whose reticence, yet ready wit, qualified him alone to attend in silence the wanderings of turtle-doves.

They would, so he planned, drive through Wales, taking their time, about till the middle of July; then, as the flush for the Principality would come earlier than the invasion of Scotland, they would again send on the trap, and similarly do the picturesque in the North, and reach Lord Valchampton's shooting-box, where would be Ralph, Ruby, and the Romilly girls by August 11th.

Meantime there would be plenty to do and to see; the

season was a late one, the may-fly not yet off the water, and Georgie's education should be advanced to throwing a fly without cracking it off behind, or spinning minnows in the lakes, astern of the boat, while Jemmy tried the allurements of cock-a-bondhu, red spinner, and black gnat.

To this effect had the two planned the campaign, and canvassed it some **fifty** times during infinite *tête-à-tête* rides in Row, or Richmond and even Bushey Parks.

Matters were rather helter-skelter in Eaton-place on the eve of the 13th of June.

May and Ada Romilly had just arrived, and as a matter of course the first object of interest to them was the inspection of the trousseau. That qualified a good hour up stairs, and there was still time to kill till tea, and before it would be cool enough to drive in the park.

Ralph, who was supposed to be doing the master of ceremonies to many members of the family in a Jermyn-street hotel, which just held them all comfortably, lounged in with Ruby by the time the girls came down again, and half the Jermyn-street contingent were there with him, when by general consent a motion was carried to adjourn to the study and criticise the array of wedding-presents laid close packed over an extended area upon a white table-cloth, the better to show off the charms of the *bijouterie*.

"Aunt Mary's present is a grand pianoforte," said Georgie in reply to May Romilly. "Jemmy was to choose it himself; but it will not go down to the Vale till we get there."

"And that *parure* is—?"

"From Uncle Valehampton; and so is that breakfast-

service in the open box. And those silver candlesticks are from Sir John Marshall."

"And where did this dressing-case come from?"

"Ruby gave me that, and a box of toothpicks to Jemmy. Here they are; he will insist upon having them properly displayed."

"What a pity it is that we are only nine bridesmaids!" said Ada Romilly from behind. "Can't we get another?"

"I am afraid we cannot. It's very disappointing; but Clara Vane accepted, and then, as she is going to be married herself next week, she puts me off, on the ground that she is not up to it."

"It doesn't much matter, after all," said May; "Ruby will do just as well. Your maid has time now to trim him a frock, and he shall have a wreath instead of a bonnet, which is all the same nowadays."

And Ruby revengefully destroyed the arrangement of her chignon, as he held a long tress in a light bridle-hand, ready to put on the curb if she didn't keep a civil tongue in her head.

"It is disappointing," said Georgie, "but I know she must feel exertion and excitement very much just now, with preparations on her hands. She sent me a very kind letter yesterday and this pretty bracelet," as she held one out to Ada for inspection.

"I sent Jack Marshall a present too," said Ruby, while he still held May in order and durance.

"What was it?" asked Georgie innocently.

"A pair of new stirrup-leathers," said Ruby quietly, as he parted the long tress between his fingers to make a couple of reins.

"You haven't, Ruby!" exclaimed Georgie, with reproachful horror.

"They are nicely packed, ready to go; it's all the same."

"If you send them, you naughty boy, I'll never speak to you again."

"You wait till you're asked to talk," said Ruby, with patronising contempt.

Jemmy had just come into the room, and said, "Ruby, there is a great box just come from Garrard's; will you open it for me and see what it means?"

And Ruby led off May by the bridle to help him in his task.

Then, in a minute or two, having, regardless of May's expostulation that he was an untidy boy to make such a mess, kicked shavings and silver-paper wholesale over the hall-floor, till he reached the kernel of the enclosure, he called to Jemmy in the next room and said,

"Here's another Croydon Cup come for you, Jemmy."

All turned out into the hall to see what was the matter.

"You untidy child!" said Georgie, when she saw the litter about the place.

"Stand away from the doorway, and let us have some light on the subject!" said Ruby peremptorily, while Jemmy raised in both hands an *epergne* of frosted silver; the stem composed of three foxes' brushes crossed in centre, the ground-group representing a "death," and bas-reliefs round the basin of "gone away," "full cry," and similar scenes to these.

"There's an inscription, if I could read it," said Jemmy, turning to the light; while eulogies upon the new arrival

were poured helter-skelter from the audience, with wonders where on earth it could have come from.

"Here's the story all about it," said Ruby, as he dived into the bottom of the polished-oak case lined with blue velvet, in which the *epergne* had stood, and extracted an illuminated sheet of vellum as long as his arm.

"Here's thirty or forty names; I can't read them all through, and it's 'Presented, with grateful remembrances of good sport and good management, and combined wishes for health and happiness, to Mr. and Mrs. James Blake'" (and he pinched Georgie's arm), "'by the undersigned Members of the O.V.H.'"

THE END.

# THE WORKS OF CHARLES LEVER.

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THE name of Charles Lever is still chiefly associated with those novels by which his popularity as a writer was first secured, and by which, perhaps, his subsequent literary reputation has been in some measure overpowered. These works have probably met with a more cordial reception from the public than from the critics. Their author may, in a certain sense, defy criticism, by exclaiming like Horace, "*Pueris canto!*" He has been the biographer of boyhood. In all his earlier works he especially addresses himself to that happy portion of mankind whose digestion is yet unimpaired, whose nerves are unshaken, in whom the breath of life has no resemblance to a sigh, and who (as he himself portrays them) are ever ready to risk, with unabated ardour, a broken neck or a broken heart at every turn in the joyous chase of existence. To the verdict of such an audience Mr. Lever has every right to appeal as gaily and as confidently as Anacreon appealed to the Loves. It would undoubtedly be as ungracious to reproach the author of 'Charles O'Malley' with the absence of those pretensions to literary dignity which he himself disclaims with so merry a laugh at dignities of every sort, as to denounce the Greek lyrist for his resolute refusal to celebrate the exploits of Atrides. To the most captious critic Mr. Lever may fairly say,—

"Non potes in nugis dicere plura meas  
Ipse ego quam dixi."

And he that can follow the adventures of HARRY LORREQUER, CHARLES O'MALLEY, JACK HINTON, and TOM BURKE, without



the frequent interruption of hearty laughter, has probably survived all sense of enjoyment in the society of the young. In any case he is not a man to be envied. To us, indeed, there is something of pathos in the reperusal of these books. It is like reading one's old love-letters, or hearing an old friend recount the frolics of one's own youth. We turn the pages with a certain tender incredulity, and there steals over us a sensation like that

"Smell of violets hidden in the green,"

which the poet declares to have

"Poured back into his empty soul and frame  
The times when he remembers to have been  
Joyful, and free from blame."

Mr. Lever's blooming young heroes, if not invariably blameless, are at least exceedingly joyful. Like the first mariners, they launch into the sea of life with breasts fortified by oak and triple brass: their constitution is Titanic. To watch them from the beaten high road of tame and ordinary experience, dashing and glittering through a stupendous steep-chase of astounding and never-ending adventure, literally takes away our breath. We cannot but sigh as we ask ourselves, "Was life indeed, then, at any time, such an uncommonly pleasant holiday?" Has not the world itself grown older and colder since those jaunty days when the dazzling Mr. Lorrequer drove his four-in-hand through all the proprieties? Is it possible that Mr. Lorrequer's son and heir, whom we presume to be now a hopeful cornet in the Blues, can be such a merry dog as we all remember his father to have been? Would not any such artless, but not invariably harmless, ebullitions of youthful mirth as those recorded with infinite gusto in the biography of the elder gentleman, be now visited with the severest penalties at the disposal of Bow Street, and denounced with the angriest eloquence at the command of the 'Times'? We suspect that the younger Mr. Lorrequer is a man of much sadder complexion. It would not, alas! surprise us to learn that, notwithstanding a prudent regard for his health, he is occasionally not altogether free from low spirits, especially when his natural hilarity is tempered by the prospective shadow of a competitive examination,

or vexed by the aggressive attentions of the Civil Service Commissioners. The fact is, that times are changed with us. Napoleon's Paladins are *pulvis et umbra*. Beau Brummel has paid his last debt. Duelling is a thing forsworn. Notwithstanding Dr. Parr's celebrated receipt for the gout, consisting of "prayer, patience, and port-wine," this latter source of human comfort is all but extinct. The epitaph of it is already written by Mr. Cobden in the French Treaty. The Union is an historical reminiscence. The Encumbered Estates Bill has done its work. "After life's fitful fever," O'Connell agitates no more. And Harry Lorrequer, and Charles O'Malley, and Jack Hinton, and Tom Burke, and Bagenal Daly, look down upon us from the distance of an age no longer ours. We have no hope ever again to meet them cantering in the Phoenix Park or swaggering down Sackville Street, or dancing at Dublin Castle. They are all "gone *proiapsi* to the Stygian shore." Like Achilles, and Ajax, and all the *fortes ante Agamemnonem*, they rest in an elysium of which the beatitude appears to us shadowy and unreal. But they have quaffed their last bumper, and shot their last shot—

"They lie beside their nectar, and their bolts are hurled."

And although their glittering hosts yet hover about the fading splendour of the "good old times," as the Scandinavian warriors are said by the Swedish poet to hover in the light of sunset over the horizon of the Baltic, yet we can no more recall them to tangible existence than we can renew the race of the Anakim.

Mr. Lever has himself survived his first progeny. That in growing an older, he has also grown a wiser, and in some respects a sadder man, his more recent writings bear witness. Job's second batch of sons and daughters, who were, doubtless, a much steadier set of young people than the first, could not have differed from that jovial crew who were overwhelmed in a whirlwind whilst "eating and drinking wine," more strongly than Mr. Lever's later works differ from his earlier ones.

The author of 'Harry Lorrequer' has given unquestionable proof of powers matured by time and enriched by cultivation. His more recent novels evince a greater mastery in the craft of authorship, a larger experience, and more skilled faculty of construction. But whether these qualities exist in so great a

degree as entirely to compensate the reader for the absence of that vivacity, freshness, and continuous flow of high animal spirits, which have rendered Mr. Lever's first books so widely and so justly popular, is a question which we shall presently have occasion to consider. Meanwhile, to say of such novels as 'Harry Lorrequer' and its immediate successors that they abound in extravagance, is to detract nothing from the merit of them. Youth is in itself the grandest of all extravagances; and these books are an emanation from, and the embodiment of, all the joyous audacity of young manhood. We cannot too largely estimate the extent to which Mr. Lever possesses the merit most essential to popularity in narrative composition—viz. *gusto*. He relates incidents with a relish, and accumulates them with a fecundity of invention and a rapidity of movement that never flag. Of all qualities in the genius of an author, this is the most necessary to the successful conduct of narrative interest; and we must the more admire it, wherever it is displayed, because it is innate, and neither to be acquired by labour, nor replaced by experience. It is to this rush and flow of vigorous animal life that we must attribute the indescribable attraction exerted by Homer upon the sympathies of all ages and conditions of men; and we accord to the Father of Verse a supremacy felt to be unattainable by any other poet, in recognition (which is perhaps partly unconscious) of the completeness with which he has expressed the high spirits and dauntless health of the boyhood of mankind. A recent poet, who deserves to be better known, has said that "the old gods were only men and wine." Their godship is certainly the extravagant idealization of the merely human faculties at their highest pitch. The same extravagance gives to the Homeric heroes their colossal proportions. Achilles and Hector will, to the end of time, be a head-and-shoulders taller than all other men, because it is impossible that any man should realize so intensely, or define so distinctly, as Homer, the supernatural dimensions of all natural faculties and sensations. To represent human beings precisely as they are, is not a necessary condition of art of any kind. A deformed saint by Massaccio may be truer in art than a correct anatomical study by Mr. Etty. Nor is there any reason why that extravagance of design which dilates either

human actions or human emotions, or even the situations of human life, to perfectly impossible proportions should be in itself a defect. For what is impossible in fact may be proper in art. Ariosto is undoubtedly one of the greatest narrative poets, and it is probably in his extravagance that we shall find the secret of his indefinable power. The humour of Quevedo is often most irresistible when it consists entirely of what might be called pure extravagance of expression. And such extravagance as is to be found in Mr. Lever's earlier novels is occasioned by the overflow of that exuberant vitality which constitutes their special excellence. The plan and character of these books are obviously panoramic rather than dramatic. It is by the narration of humorous incident that the interest of the reader is to be carried on. For this, rapidity and gusto are the best of all qualifications. No great writer of narrative fiction has ever been wholly without them. Le Sage possessed them largely; they are to be detected in the sadder and more profound genius of Cervantes; they are not wanting to the elaborate minuteness of De Foe; they give vigour to the most envenomed creations of Swift; they are remarkable in Sir Walter Scott, than whom, certainly, there is no happier master of the art of telling a story. Fielding, though his genius philosophizes while it frolics, was far from neglecting those means of exciting interest which depend upon the rapid movement and striking effect of incident. But Smollett certainly possessed the gift of high spirits to a pre-eminent degree. The extraordinary impulse and animation of his genius is such, that his narrative, though often extremely digressive, always rushes away with the reader, and carries him, like a runaway horse, over every obstacle, "*turbine raptus ingenii*."

In this respect Mr. Lever, of all modern novelists, most resembles the author of 'Roderick Random.' There is, indeed, not only much similarity of character between the works of Charles Lever and those of Tobias Smollett, but also no inconsiderable coincidence in the circumstances which may possibly have given to the genius of both authors something of the same tendency.

The Irish humorist, like his great Scotch predecessor, was, we believe, brought up for the medical profession, and for

some years practised as a doctor. Whether indeed Mr. Lever found his profession as little profitable to him as it would appear to have proved to Dr. Smollett, or whether he was simply impelled to abandon so sober a career by the consciousness of those powers of humour and that facility of composition which he evinced at an early age, we do not know; but it is difficult to believe that the pen which wrote 'Charles O'Malley,' or that which wrote 'Peregrine Pickle,' would have been equally well employed in signing prescriptions. To the experience of medical life, however, to the opportunities for the study of character thereby afforded, and the quickness of penetration and habits of observation thus acquired, it is highly probable that both Smollett and Lever have owed much excellent material for humorous fiction. Both authors appear to have early evinced, and long retained, an extreme predilection for a military life. Smollett, indeed, never forgave his grandfather for thwarting his inclination to enter the army; and he never omits an occasion for introducing into his novels some description of martial scenes and events. There is fair reason to attribute to both Smollett and Lever some carelessness, not so much of composition, as of writing. They both appear to have written hastily. Of Smollett it is told that (whilst writing the 'Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves') "when post-time drew near he used to retire for half-an-hour or an hour to prepare the necessary quantity of *copy*, as it is technically called in the printing-house, which he never gave himself the trouble to correct, or even to read once." And we may assume that Mr. Lever, speaking through the mask of Harry Lorrequer, is not very wide of the truth when he says, "I wrote as I felt—sometimes in good spirits, sometimes in bad—always carelessly—for, God help me! I can do no better." Smollett is, indeed, the more correct writer of the two; his style, though often hasty, is never inaccurate, and, for the most part, his English is very pure. Mr. Lever's language, on the contrary, is in places so heedless that the grammar of it is sometimes more conventional than correct. In one place he speaks of "purchasing a boon," and in another he describes an Irish member waiting "till the House was done prayers." Nevertheless he has great powers of description. He represents objects and

actions with a touch that is always vivid, often masterly. He is always happy in the open air; in his love of nature and hearty relish of out-of-door life, as well as in the force and fidelity with which he depicts them, he is certainly unsurpassed, and perhaps unequalled, by Smollett himself. The veracity, freshness, and power with which he describes scenery is deserving, we think, of higher appreciation than it has yet received. His pictures of Irish landscape, sea scenery, and all effects of wind and weather, are full of the truth and intensity which belong to poetry. It is for such reasons all the more to be regretted that an author entitled on so many grounds to hold a permanent place in literature should ever be forgetful of the duty which is owed by eminent writers to the language they bequeath to posterity. Some expressions throughout Mr. Lever's works, so incorrect as to be obvious oversights, have passed through so many editions that we must believe the *ὁ γέγραφα γέγραφα* sentiment to be in him unusually strong, and that what he writes he never revises. The bent of such minds as those of Mr. Lever and Dr. Smollett is instinctively conservative, loyal, and inclined to the maintenance of institutions which have been tested and endeared by time. On the one hand, a shrewd appreciation of life as it is, and a keen sense of the ludicrous and incongruous, indisposes them to indulge in the dreams of democracy; whilst, on the other hand, a certain chivalry of disposition induces them to side with a cause which, by the very nature of it, must always be that of the party attacked. Conservatism, therefore, has found in each of these writers a warm and ready adherent. To continue any further this passing comparison between the two authors would be tedious and pedantic; but if we turn to the books themselves, we cannot but remark a resemblance which in many respects is striking.

The merits as well as the defects of both writers are, for the most part, of the same kind. Their humour does not always rise above fun, their fun sometimes degenerates into farce. Criticism, which is applicable to such books as 'Harry Lorrequer' and 'Charles O'Malley' may equally be applied to 'Roderick Random' and 'Peregrine Pickle.' We can feel little sympathy for the heroes themselves, and still less for

the greater part of the personages by whom we find them surrounded. Roderick Random is a low-minded, selfish, unamiable character. Harry Lorrequer is not much more thoughtful of the feelings of others, and his various misdeeds are only not amenable to the gravest censure because they render gravity impossible, and compel the reader himself to become an accomplice in their impish frolic. Peregrine Pickle is a brutal savage, indulging an almost fiendish delight in the prosecution of the most barbarous practical jokes. Charles O'Malley, though much less repulsive, is certainly a brawling mischievous fellow, whose acquaintance we, for our own part, must confess we should little desire out of a book. The female characters are often too merely animal, or else too shadowy and indistinct, to inspire much interest. Of the rest of the *dramatis personæ* the larger portion is often made up of adventurers, blacklegs, practical jokers, and such oddities and odds and ends of humanity as seem only made to furnish material for practical jokes. The heroes ramble from page to page, through scenes and situations almost unconnected, and characters which crowd one portion of the book hardly appear in another.

Yet, when the critic has summed up all such apparent grounds of objection, he will find that they constitute no real defect in the art of these romances, which can only be criticized in accordance with the laws which they themselves create. The fact is, Art does not make Genius, but Genius makes Art. "Genius," says Kant, in his 'Analysis of the Sublime,' "is the talent to produce that of which one cannot give the determining rule, and not the ability that one can show in doing that which one can learn by a rule. Hence originality is its first quality." Every writer of original genius has his own object, and his own way of carrying it out; and his success or failure can only be fairly estimated by reference to the object which he has himself had in view, not that which the critic expects him to have had in view. The barbarous conduct of the clown in the pantomime, the elfish perversity and duplicity of the Pierot in the French Harlequinade, and the excessive profligacy of the Don Juan in the play, inspire no disgust, outrage no moral sentiment, revolt no sympathy, but only excite innocent and hearty laughter.

When a clown trips up a baker in the street, wheels him off in his own barrow, trundles him into his own oven, and there bakes him alive, the fate of the baker excites no pity, and the inhumanity of his persecutor no indignation. And when Harry Lorrequer initiates his proceedings in Dublin, by gratuitously detailing to a perfectly inoffensive stranger an elaborate falsehood, and afterwards shoots the man he has insulted, without the least consciousness of any reason why he should fight him at all, we laugh at the drollery of the misdeed described, without for a moment attributing either to ourselves or the author any participation in the immorality of the conduct which causes our merriment. We know beforehand that all such victims are only men of straw, purposely so contrived as to minister to the fitting spirit of mischievous fun which presides over that entirely fantastical world wherein all that passes is too impossible in fact to come within the jurisdiction of any moral law, and yet sufficiently real in art to enthrall attention and create pleasurable emotion. It is in securing this result that the art and genius of the author consist; and we believe it is no less an authority than Sir Walter Scott who has said, "If it be the highest praise of pathetic composition that it draws forth tears, why should it not be esteemed the greatest excellence of the ludicrous that it compels laughter? The one tribute is at least as genuine an expression of natural feeling as the other." Certainly, in the power of producing effects irresistibly ludicrous, and instantaneously destructive of all gravity, Mr. Lever is pre-eminent, and may challenge comparison with any writer, living or dead. Nor is even the broad fun of Mr. Lever's earliest novels destitute of passages which indicate powers of thoughtful humour and subtle irony. Sparks's story, in 'Harry Lorrequer,' and the description in it of the man who loves a mad girl—his sensations on discovering her insanity, and hers on finding that he is not the Ace of Spades, and that she has taken "the nephew of a Manchester cotton-spinner, with a face like printed calico, for a trump card, and the best in the pack," is told with an irresistible drollery which only partially conceals a depth of grave sad satire and pathetic allegory. The story of the Knight of Kerry's conversation with the Irish tenant, who



earns his "rints" by personating a wild man in a London showroom, has in it much more than the merely ludicrous. The origin of the story would undoubtedly appear to be Hibernian, but it has also been told by Paul de Kock, with little more alteration than that of substituting Frenchmen for Irishmen, and Paris for London. Mr. Lever's version of the story, however, is far more humorous, and in all respects infinitely better than that of the French novelist. But of all the characters in Mr. Lever's earlier romances, that which affords most evidence of this higher kind of humour, is undoubtedly Mickey Free; and the story (as recounted by himself) of how he got his father's soul out of purgatory, is so excellently well told, and is so admirable a specimen of that sly wit which is characteristic of the Irish peasant, that it is with great reluctance that we refrain from extracting it.

The whole character of Mickey Free is indeed inimitable. We have no hesitation in affirming it to be the most perfect type of Irish humour that has ever been given to the world. It is perfectly sustained from first to last, and nothing in the conception of it is exaggerated or incongruous. Mickey Free is the Irish Sam Weller. He has, in fact, this advantage over Sam Weller, that he is the more thoroughly national and comprehensive type of the two. It is impossible but what this creation, which is in many respects the most felicitous of all Mr. Lever's creations, should live for ever as a distinct embodiment of national character. It must always have a historical value; and it is indeed so truthfully and so comprehensively drawn, that whoever has since attempted to describe in future the Irish peasant, has appeared to copy rather from Lever than from nature. Mickey Free, however, is but one (although, to our thinking, the best) picture in Mr. Lever's large gallery of Irish portraits.

The KNIGHT OF GWYNNE is another equally characteristic; and it is perhaps more delicately, although less vividly, delineated. Nothing can be more complete than this elaborate picture of a character which has ceased to exist—the high-bred, ill-starred Irish gentleman of the days before the Union. It is a strange anomaly, combining all the courtly grace and refinement of a Sir Charles Grandison with the rude, half-civilized life of a Rob Roy; at once splendid

and spendthrift ; chivalrous in all things, careful in nothing ; alienating prosperity, yet elevating misfortune, and always *débonnaire* in the midst of disaster ; every inch a gentleman, yet just such a gentleman as seems destined by Providence to ruin himself, and hasten the ruin of the class to which he belongs. The Knight of Gwynne is certainly one of the most lovable characters that Mr. Lever has ever drawn ; and he monopolizes so much of our sympathy, that we hope to be forgiven for extending less of it than he probably deserves to Bagenal Daly, notwithstanding the vigour with which that character is drawn, the remarkable originality of it, and the fidelity with which it represents and sustains a most peculiar combination of qualities, intellectual as well as moral.

We may, however, note here by the way that this singular character is the first of Mr. Lever's earlier creations, in which he has given evidence of that shrewd experience of mankind, that practical worldly wit, and power of philosophical epigram, into which his natural humour has developed itself in more recent works ; and there are passages of dialogue between "the Howling Wind" and his Irish Scot which not unfrequently remind one of the dry humorous wisdom which abounds in such creations as Dalgetty and Sancho Panza. This work is indeed a most complete and varied picture of Irish life and manners. The book is written with a profound knowledge of the subject of it ; and, without overloading the narrative with political or philosophical discussion, the author never loses sight of a thoughtful purpose ; he penetrates beneath the surface of the society which he describes, and lays bare, with the ease and accuracy of a skilful anatomist, all the minutest causes and remotest effects of those social and political phenomena which in Ireland preceded the Union. The Castlereagh policy is sketched with the masterly hand of a man who has thoroughly comprehended both the nature of the measure itself, and that of the country to which it referred. The whole epoch of that time is indeed reproduced, investigated, and criticized by Mr. Lever, with an accuracy of delineation and depth of reflection which show him to be not only an admirable novelist, but something also of a philosophical politician. What is especially to be noted in this book is, that all the principal

characters therein are the representatives of *genera* rather than of *species*—that is to say, they image and embody large aggregates of national character rather than individual and special peculiarities. Creation of this kind necessitates many high powers of thought as well as of fancy ; and although Mr. Lever has not attempted it so often as he gives us reason to wish, yet, wherever he has done so, his success cannot be disputed. The old Irish proprietor, the old Irish domestic, the petty usurer, the Irish attorney, founders of a new race of landlords ; the Irishman of the north, and the Irishman of the south—are all admirably described in the ‘Knight of Gwynne.’ Freeny, the robber, is also a very well-drawn character ; and the escape of Freeny from the burning jail is a scene which in power and terror fully justifies the admiration of it formerly entertained by Miss Edgeworth.

Mr. Lever has, indeed, given many proofs that he is by no means deficient in the faculty of exciting terror, and some of his night-rides, his battle-scenes, and robber-meetings have about them a palpability and intensity which may fairly entitle them to compete for praise with Smollett’s much admired sea-engagements. It is as having given the completest and most intense expression to Irish humour, and furnished familiar types of almost every distinction of Irish character, that Mr. Lever, whatever may be his other merits, will, in our opinion, maintain a solid and permanent reputation as a humorist. Scenes which, in such novels as ‘O’Malley’ and ‘Hinton,’ may perhaps appear to Cockney critics as simple impossibilities, are truly facts of Irish life ; and Mr. Lever has so little caricatured or exaggerated the habits and characters of Irishmen, that those parts of his Irish novels which appear absurdly unreal are only ridiculously *true*. It would be entirely beyond the scope and purpose of these remarks to discuss the relative value of any really original conception ; but we see no reason to doubt why Mickey Free, and Major Monsoon, and Kerry O’Leary, and Baby Blake, Mary Martin, and Kate O’Donoghue, and Kenny, and Mrs. Dodd, should not live as long as Jeanie Deans, or Matthew Bramble, or Squire Weston, or any other distinctly-recognized type of national character.

That conviction which is entertained by Irishmen, not without a certain self-satisfaction, that their characters are all but incomprehensible to Englishmen; the humorous enjoyment which they derive from the consciousness that their ways and habits are a continual source of dismay and bewilderment to their fellow-subjects over the water; and a certain sense of not unnatural resentment, with which, some years ago, the Irish people must have been disposed to regard every attempt on the part of Government to shape out or constrain the pattern of their national life into formal accordance with the modes and manners of an alien and dominant race—have furnished Mr. Lever with many opportunities for drollery at the expense of Cockney critics. An amusing piece of good-humoured caricature in this sense occurs in the story of the gentleman who never saw daylight in Ireland, which occupies the twenty-fourth chapter of 'Jack Hinton.' Equally comical in its way is the quiz upon Mr. Prettyman, the "intelligent traveller."

As instances of easy and natural Irish humour, we may refer, by the way, to the oration delivered by Kerry O'Leary over the ruins of the doctor's gig, in the fourteenth chapter of 'The O'Donoghue,' and the priest's moonlit ride in 'Jack Hinton.' Mr. Lever has also shown, in the death of Mary Martin, that he can, when he pleases, be pathetic as well as humorous. His female characters are seldom very refined or very interesting. In depicting a romping "wild Irish girl," a wily adventuress, a Continental demirep, or a pretentious petticoated parvenue, he is never at fault; but his women are for the most part either *rouées*, romps, or Xantippes; and the majestic visions which animate old Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women,' and inspired Wordsworth's picture of the "perfect woman, nobly planned," never flit across his pages. If, indeed, modern mothers and daughters are only half as knowing, vigilant, and unscrupulous in their designs upon that portion of humanity, who have not only breeches but breeches pockets, no batchelor can have a chance against the female foe; all unmarried men are marching through an enemy's country, in which they must expect at every step to have their flank turned by some astute matrimonial manœuvre.

We cannot, however, sufficiently praise Mr. Lever for his

evidently hearty abhorrence of all sentimentality and false writing. The most tempting occasion never betrays him into this—he is always manly, simple, and sincere in his treatment of sentiment and passion. This is no small virtue in a modern novelist—many of our modern writers, like our modern singers, are always in *falsetto*; and the public is in both cases always entrapped into applause.

Nor can we pass from the consideration of Mr. Lever's earlier romances without according our cordial approbation of the admirable ballads, fighting songs, and drinking songs, which are interspersed throughout the pages of those books. These songs are full of spirit—they have all the drollery, dash, and devilry peculiar to the land of the shamrock and shillelah. If they have here and there a flavour of poteen, the scent of the heather and the breath of the mountain breeze are equally strong in them. It is almost impossible to read them without singing them, and almost impossible to hear them sung without wishing to fight, drink, or dance. They bubble forth without premeditation from the depth of a most joyous conviction in the

“ Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero  
Pulsanda tellus.”

We believe that Mr. Lever's later novels are, on the whole, less generally popular than those by which his reputation as a writer was first acquired. This is natural, for many reasons quite independent of the merits or defects of the works themselves. The public is seldom of one mind with an author in comparing the relative merit of his works, especially where such comparison is between early and subsequent efforts. The author is naturally inclined to esteem most highly those of his works upon which he is conscious of having expended most labour; the public, on the contrary, are inclined to prefer those to the enjoyment of which they have given the least labour. The first works of an original writer take us by surprise. They issue unexpectedly from the unknown, our enjoyment of them is spontaneous, and the delight occasioned by the freshness of feeling with which the author writes is increased by the freshness of sympathy with which the public reads. Every man's favourite poet is the poet he

first learned to love under the summer trees in his boyhood. New poets only address new generations. The authors which most agreeably impress us are those which we read when most capable of receiving agreeable impressions; that is to say, in youth. We cannot even entirely renew for the subsequent works of the same author those sensations of delight which we derived from our first acquaintance with him, when he was young to us, and we were young to ourselves; and in proportion as we experience this difficulty on our own part, we are inclined to resent more naturally than justly the inability of the author to overcome it. Long familiarity, moreover, with the name of an author, often indisposes the public to expect much novelty from increased familiarity with the mind of him. Nothing is so reluctantly conceded to a popular writer as superiority to *himself*. The more readily his claim to attention and sympathy has been admitted in one direction, the more resolutely is it resisted in every other. A previous success is often the greatest hindrance to a subsequent reputation. People are sometimes startled into applause by the first revelation of an original mind; they are generally on their guard against any inconsiderate approval of a second. And as the process by which the mind of an author passes from one phase into another is usually gradual, and marked by various stages of development more or less imperfect and unsatisfactory, the advance made is not always immediately noticeable, and the recognition accorded to it is naturally slow and dubious. This must be especially the case with an author who has introduced himself to the public rather as a boon-companion than a moralist. We have often heard it said of Mr. Lever that he is much less funny than he used to be; which is indeed true. But when it is asked why he does not resort to the style and matter of his early novels, and implied that he should write nothing but 'Harry Lorrequer's' and 'Charles O'Malley's,' we must express the conviction that compliance with any such demand, even if it were not purely impossible, would be altogether unadvisable. We could not ourselves bring to the perusal of repeated 'Harry Lorrequer's' an undiminished capacity to be amused by them. *Consuetudine vilescent*. The piper might pipe as of old, but who would dance to his piping? *Non eadem est ætas, non*

*mens.* We cannot blame Mr. Lever for abandoning a vein of humour which he has the merit of having exhausted ; but it is nevertheless obvious, that in relinquishing that particular kind of fiction in which he is allowed to have excelled, Mr. Lever has withdrawn from a territory of which he was sole and undisputed proprietor, and entered upon one in which, whatever the acquirements he may bring to the cultivation of it, he is not without competitors.

It must be conceded that what we miss in Mr. Lever's later publications is that freshness, vivacity, and exuberant wealth of animal spirits, which gave to his earlier novels their chief charm. Although the relative merit of his recent works is decidedly unequal, some of them being much better than others, and all of them being better in one part than in another ; yet there is in the majority of them a sameness of subject and material which does not give fair play to the powers employed upon them. Upon this point we shall speak more fully by-and-by ; but whatever objections we may presently have to make in detail to some of Mr. Lever's last books, we have no hesitation in expressing the opinion, that amongst these books are to be found proofs of a genius richer, maturer, and more pleasing than any which is apparent in the earlier works of the same author. Indeed, 'The Dodd Family Abroad,' which has not been published many years, is in our opinion the best of all Mr. Lever's works. He has written nothing at any time comparable to the letters of Henry Dodd ; nor could there be any better evidence than what is afforded throughout the pages of this delightful and good-humoured satire, that the genius of the author, if it has lost much of that physical animation which is the arbitrary gift of youth, has acquired with years that thoughtful and more pleasing humour which is the result of enlarged experience and deeper sympathy with mankind. 'This chronicle of the adventures of 'THE DODD FAMILY ABROAD,' like 'The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker,' Smollett's last and most pleasing fiction, is a narrative thrown into epistolary form, and related by the actors themselves, who are thus made with great skill to be, as it were, the unconscious exponents of their own characters, follies, and foibles, as well as the historians of their own fates. We do not desire to

suggest even a critical comparison between this clever romance and that master-piece of Smollett, which will doubtless remain unrivalled as long as the English literature endures. But the most conspicuous merit in 'The Dodd Family' is, that each character in the story is so contrived as to evoke, in the most humorous form, the peculiarities of all the others, without any violation of the individuality assigned to itself. The book, which is a sort of prose 'Fudge Family,' deeper, broader, and more comprehensive than Moore's clever satire, is a good-humoured but unsparing mockery of "false pretences" all over the world. If the dramatic power exist in the capacity to realize and express with an accuracy, too great for mere conjecture, other people's habits of thought and feeling, Mr. Lever has shown in this book more of such power than in anything else he has ever written. The humour of his earlier books is almost entirely superficial. It deals purely with external things, and is little more than any extraordinarily acute sense of the ludicrous in situation and circumstance. In this book the humour is of that rarer kind which plays less with external and accidental peculiarities than with men's modes of thought, and the manner in which different minds are impressed by the same facts, or operated on by the same influences. The difference of the result in each case is great. The highest humour is inseparable from a profound sympathy with human nature, and is therefore always tinged with sadness. For man is too grand a subject, after all, for eternal practical jokes, and even the most defaced and misfeatured humanity should be safe from unmitigated laughter. The fun which abounds, however, in Mr. Lever's more youthful writings, ignores the existence of sorrow in any sense but that of hateful deformity, to be contemplated as little as possible: and consequently this sort of fun, incompatible as it is with any deep sympathy, is never quite free from a certain element of cruelty, inherent to the strong animal life of early youth. But what is most delightful in the letters of "K. I." is that loving, tender capacity to feel for and with humanity in all the forms of its imperfection and weakness—that tendency to live in the life of others, and to draw from the various thoughts and acts and manners of mankind constant food for reflection, which breathe



through the playful satire, and furnish material to the genial humour of those charming letters. And though the author appears to have given fuller scope both to his own sentiments and his own experience in the letters of "K. I.," yet the same spirit of kindly humour, and the same shrewd appreciation of social characteristics, are apparent in all the epistles, even where the drollery most approaches to caricature, as in those of the Irish servant-girl who complains to her friends at home of being like "a pelican on a dissolute island."

Of all Mr. Dodd's numerous misfortunes, those under which his patience is most pathetic, and which enlist our warmest sympathies, are certainly his domestic and conjugal afflictions. Who that remembers or anticipates matrimonial experience can read without a cold shudder this description of the household tactics adopted on great occasions by Mrs. Dodd ?—

"For the last week Mrs. D. had adopted a kind of warfare, at which she, I'll be bound to say, has few equals and no superior—a species of irregular attack, at all times and on all subjects, by innuendo and insinuation, so dexterously thrown out as to defy opposition; for you might as well take your musket to keep off the mosquitoes! What she was driving at I never could guess, for the assault came on every flank and in all manner of ways. If I was dressed a little more carefully than usual, she called attention to my 'smartness;' if less so, she hinted that I was probably going out 'on the sly.' If I stayed at home, I was waiting for somebody; if I went out, it was to 'meet them.' But all this guerilla warfare gave way at last to a grand attack, when I ventured to remonstrate about some extravagance or other. 'It came well from *me*,' she burst forth with indignant anger—'it came well from me to talk of the little necessary expenses of the family—the bit they ate, and the clothes on their backs.' She spoke as if they were Mandans or Iroquois, and lived in a wigwam!"

Poets, we are told by one of them, "learn in suffering what they teach in song," and philosophers acquire wisdom from their own afflictions. Mr. Dodd, in the true spirit of the philosophy preached by Æschylus, *παρ' ἄκοντας ἡλθε σωφρονεῖν*, thus moralizes on his own misfortune :—

"Ah, Tom, my boy, it's all very good fun to laugh at Keeley, or

Buckstone, or any other of those diverting vagabonds who can convulse the house with such a theme, but in real life the Farce is downright Tragedy. There is not a single comfort or consolation of your life that is not kicked clean from under you ! A system of normal agitation is a fine thing, they tell us, in politics, but it is a cruel adjunct of domestic life ! Everything you say, every look you give, every letter you seal, or every note you receive, are counts in a mysterious indictment against you, till at last you are afraid to blow your nose, lest it be taken for a signal to the fat widow lady that is caressing her poodle at the window over the way ! ”

But his greatest trial of all is the prospect of a sudden accession of fortune to the ambitious partner of his bosom. His excessive alarm at the possibility of a contingency so fatal to domestic happiness is very humorous, and his opinions upon the subject of legacies to married ladies in small circumstances are evidently the result of profound and painful experience.

“To tell you the plain truth, Tom, I don't know a greater misfortune for a man that has married a wife without money, than to discover at the end of some fifteen or twenty years that somebody has left her a few hundred pounds ! It is not only that she conceives visions of unbounded extravagance, and raves about all manner of expense, but she begins to fancy herself an heiress that was thrown away, and imagines wonderful destinies she might have arrived at, if she hadn't had the bad luck to meet you. For a real crab-apple of discord, I'll back a few hundreds in the Three per Cents. against all the family jars that ever were invented.

“Save us, then, from this, if you can, Tom. There must surely be twenty ways to avoid the legacy ; and so that Mrs. D. doesn't hear of it, I'd rather you'd prove her illegitimate, than allow her to succeed to this bequest. I'll not enlarge upon all I feel about this subject, hoping that by your skill and address we may never hear more of it ; but I tell you, frankly, I'd face the small-pox with a stouter heart than the news of succeeding to the M'Carthy inheritance.”

The adventures of a vulgar Irish family abroad in search of economy combined with pretension and display, afford Mr Lever a good opportunity for satirising the social and political condition of a great number of foreign States. In doing this he has shown not only an affluent experience of Continental life, and a quick perception of all social phenomena,

but also a very uncommon amount of shrewd common-sense and sound political judgment. We must say the satire is well deserved and unerringly aimed. Nothing escapes. The state of society, the conduct of government, the foreign and domestic policy, the administration of justice, the civil and military jurisdictions, the morals and manners of Continental capitals, are sharply canvassed. The character, too, of Kenny Dodd, in its strange admixture of childishness and wisdom, ignorance of the world and knowledge of mankind, and that subdued humorous consciousness which it betrays of the utter worthlessness of those influences to which it is ever an easy victim, greatly facilitates the indulgence of that moralizing vein in which Mr. Lever reviews almost every possible aspect of society. From the moment in which K. I. discovers that "shamelessness is the grand characteristic of foreign life," and that "one picks up the indecency much easier than the irregular verbs," the wisdom of his private reflections keeps pace with the folly of his public proceedings.

We extract the following passage from Mr. Dodd's reflections upon geology and the sciences, viewed in their relation to education and politics, because it is a favourable sample of a particular kind of humour in which Mr. Lever's later writings, and especially the work from which the passage is taken, are equally fertile and felicitous. It is a humour which consists in turning some indisputable truth upside down or inside out when the reader is least expecting it. The effect is often irresistible.

"For a man who has daughters abroad, my advice is—stick to the sciences. Grey sandstone is safer than the polka, and there's not as dangerous an experiment in all chemistry as singing duets with some black-bearded blackguard from Naples or Palermo. Now mind, Tom, this counsel of mine applies to the education of the young, for when people come to the forties, you may rely upon it, if they set about learning anything, they'll have the devil for a schoolmaster. What does all the geology mean? Junketting, Tom—nothing but junketting! Primitive rock is another name for a Pic-nic, and what they call Quartz is a figurative expression for iced champagne. Just reflect for a moment and see what it comes to. You can enter a protest against family extravagances when they take the shape of balls and soirees, but what are you to do against botanical excursions and anti-

quarian researches? It's like writing yourself down Goth at once to oppose these. 'Oh, papa hates chemistry; he despises natural history,' that's the cry at once, and they hold me up to ridicule just in the way the rascally Protestant newspapers did Dr. Cullen, for saying that he didn't believe the world was round. If the liberty of the subject be worth anything—if the right for which these same Protestants are always prating, private judgment, be the great privilege they deem it—why shouldn't Dr. Cullen have his own opinion about the shape of the earth? He can say, 'It suits *me* to think that I'm walking erect on a flat surface, and not crawling along with my head down, like a fly on the ceiling! I'm happier when I believe what doesn't puzzle my understanding, and I don't want any more miracles than we have in the church.' He may say that, and I'd like to know what harm does that do you or me? Does it endanger the Protestant succession or the State religion? Not a bit of it, Tom. The real fact is simply this: private judgment is a boon they mean to keep for themselves, and never share with their neighbours! So far as I have seen of life, there's no such tyrant as your Protestant, and for this reason: it's bad enough to force a man to believe something that he doesn't like, but it's ten times worse to make him disbelieve what he's well satisfied with; and that's exactly what they do. Even on the ground of common humanity it is indefensible. If my private judgment goes in favour of saints' toe-nails and martyrs' shin-bones, I have a right to my opinion, and you have no right to attack it. Besides, I won't be badgered into what it may suit somebody else to think. My opinion is like my flannel-waistcoat, that I'll take off or put on as the weather requires; and I think it very cruel that I must wear mine simply because you feel cold."

When Mr. Dodd moralizes on the field of Waterloo, his words are the words of wisdom. Could Mr. Mill himself be more logical on the subject of Divine Right? All the political philosophers in the world could add but little to this pithy summary of the case, as between kings and peoples:—

"I know you'll reply to me with your old argument about Legitimacy and Divine Right, and all that kind of thing. But, my dear Tom, for the matter of that, haven't I a divine right to my ancestral estate of Tullylicknaslatterley; and look what they're going to do with it, to-morrow or next day! 'T is much Commissioner Longfield would mind, if I begged to defer the sale on the ground of 'divine right.' *Kings are exactly like landlords; they can't do what they like with their own, hard as it may seem to say so. They have their obligations and their duties; and if they fail in them, they come into*

*the Encumbered Estates Court just like us—ay, and just like us, they 'take very little by their motion.'*

"I know it's very hard to be turned out of your 'holding.' I can imagine the feelings with which a man would quit such a comfortable quarter as the Tuileries, and such a nice place for summer as Versailles; Dodsborough is too fresh in my mind to leave any doubt on this point: but there's another side of the question, Tom. What were they there for? You'll call out, 'This is all Socialism and Democracy, and the devil knows what else.' Maybe I'll agree with you. Maybe I'll say, I don't like the doctrine myself. Maybe I'll tell you that I think the old time was pleasantest, when if we pressed a little hard to-day, why, we were all the kinder to-morrow, and both ruler and ruled looked more leniently on each other's faults. But say what we will—do what we will—these days are gone by, and they'll not come back again. There's a set of fellows at work, all over the world, telling the people about their rights. Some of these are very acute and clever chaps, that don't overstate the case; they neither go off into any flights about Universal Equality, or any balderdash about our being of the same stock; but they stick to two or three hard propositions, and they say, '*Don't pay more for anything than you can get it for—that's free trade; don't pay for anything you don't want—that's a blow at the Church Establishment; don't pay for soldiers if you don't want to fight—that's at a 'standing army;'*' and above all, *when you haven't a pair of breeches to your back, don't be buying embroidered small-clothes for Lords-in-Waiting or Gentlemen of the Bedchamber.'* But here I am again, running away from Waterloo, just as if I was a Belgian."

K. I. has certainly no pretension to be a faultless philosopher, but he is a very pleasant one. Montaigne would have chosen him for a companion. Molière would have sympathised with and loved him. He has so large a sympathy for human nature, that his own claim upon that of the reader is irresistible; and so kindly and compassionate a feeling for the imperfections of mankind, that we follow him with undiminished affection through all the faults and follies that he so frankly attributes to himself. He so innocently pleads guilty to the occasional "delight of doing wrong;" there is something so natural in the touch of envy with which he remarks that "India-rubber itself is not so elastic as a bad character," and so sly an appeal to commiseration in his candid avowal, "I don't want to disparage principle, no more than I do a great balance at Coutts's, or anything else that I don't

possess myself," that all such good-humoured self-accusations are at once understood to be among the philosophical paradoxes peculiar to that vein of banter which proves all problems by the *ad absurdum* argument, and which he frequently indulges at his own expense. Mr. Lever is, indeed, so happy in the management of dialogue, and in the art of allowing his characters to evolve themselves without interference from the author, that there is every reason to think he would be successful in the comic drama: and were he to exercise his genius in that direction we have little doubt but what he would do much to rescue the English stage from its present discreditable obligation to the charity of third-rate French play-wrights. Our extracts from 'The Dodd Family' have extended over a larger space than we could well afford, because it is our sincere opinion that Mr. Lever has written nothing comparable to this book; and without ample reference to the work itself, it was hardly possible to justify the opinion which we have not hesitated to express about it.

The 'Dodd Family' is an elaborate denunciation of the folly of "people living upon false pretences;" and 'Davenport Dunn,' which deals with the crimes rather than the follies of society, exposes with considerable power, and an extraordinary knowledge of the dark side of modern civilization, the innumerable "fraudulent pretences" of roguery in every rank of life. The character of Dunn himself, which is that of the brilliant commercial swindler, the Robert Law of these days, whose roguery is on a magnificent scale, is carefully drawn; and Mr. Lever has certainly the merit of never allowing himself to be tempted into conventional exaggeration of this character. Davenport Dunn is a rascal of genius, and throughout all his roguery he remains sufficiently human and natural (the good being never entirely obliterated by the evil in his complex character) to justify to the last the interest which his career excites in the mind of the reader. His ambition, before it comes in contact with distracting and debasing influences, is legitimate, and even noble; and the gradual deterioration of a character whose power is uncontrolled by principle, is finely worked out. But the best and most powerful character in this book—a character in which Mr. Lever has shown, in addition to his ordinary knowledge

of the world, no ordinary knowledge of human nature—is that of Grog Davis, the professional “sporting swindler.” This man, a vulgar blackleg, and in all his dealings with society a most unmitigated scoundrel, nevertheless affects us with a sense of power, and secures from us a degree of interest which it would be impossible to feel for a character of which the delineation was less true to the deepest realities of nature. The whole conception of this character is, indeed, of the highest order. The one redeeming point in the much-defaced humanity of this man, and the secret of the strong dramatic interest which he excites, lies in his devoted and absorbing affection for his daughter.

Whatever he has in him better than the fiend, or above the brute, is concentrated in this affection, of which the pathos is all the more poignant from the power of nature which it indicates, and the contrast which it suggests with the prostitution of that power in the habitual life of the man. The professional associations of Grog Davis with the turf and the fashionable gambling-houses of Europe, bring him into daily contact with the most worthless and demoralized members of the upper ranks of society. Their ambition to be knaves renders them only the dupes of a knavery more practised and audacious than their own; and the contempt of the professional swindler for those who, though his superiors in social rank, are only his equals in infamy, and his inferiors in the dexterity which renders infamy partially profitable, is embittered by his haunting consciousness that they are by birthright the inheritors of what a man may desecrate but cannot transfer, and that the sphere from which they descend into connection with him is one into which, by no possible connection with them, is he able to elevate himself. His dreary and restricted experience teaches him that there is no moral degradation which men will not incur for the sake of money, and from this he argues to the conclusion that there is no social disability which may not be overcome by that all-powerful agent. He therefore labours to accumulate wealth dishonestly, in order that he may make his child rich enough to be honest. What matter though his own hands be soiled?—hers shall be stainless! What matter though he heap infamy on himself, if it be to bequeath to her the purity and inno-

cence which, the further it is removed from the depths of his own degradation, the more he delights to contemplate and revere in the future of his child? The profligate gentlemen who are his boon companions may laugh away, in the course of a night's debauch, the reputation of every duchess in England; but where is he, so bold of tongue, or so sure of his pistol-practice, as shall dare to find a spot on the character of the daughter of the "infamous Grog Davis?" Whilst he, for her sake, is plotting nefarious plunder, in the company of men whose presence is pollution, she, an innocent happy girl, in her convent at Brussels, shall be learning all that can refine and elevate life—the associate of spotless maidens, and the pupil of the most accomplished teachers that money can secure. And in all this notable scheme nothing is overlooked save that alone which involves the inevitable failure of it. It never occurs to the remarkable natural shrewdness of a man whose experience, however varied, is limited exclusively to evil, that in this world, where the consequences of evil are endless, the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, and that, in the eye of society, the daughter of the "infamous Grog Davis," were she wise as Sheba, and pure as Ruth, can never be other than the child of infamy, and the inheritor of shame. And so complete is his inability to realize or comprehend any but social distinctions between right and wrong, that although there is no self-sacrifice of which he is not capable to secure the happiness of his child, and no barbarity in which he would scruple to indulge his vengeance on the man who should injure her, yet he is himself a conspirator to sell her in marriage to the most abjectly worthless and contemptible of all his infamous associates, simply because that man is brother and heir to a peer of the realm. That the daughter of Grog Davis should be a peeress, for this Grog Davis schemes to secure as his son-in-law a man whom he knows to be guilty of forgery, and whom he himself despises as a poltroon. This is the summit of his ambition. And how a theory of life which insults human nature is defeated by human nature itself; how the human heart vindicates its inherent birthright to the control of its own destinies, and avenges upon itself the wrongs inflicted by itself upon its better aspirations; how, out of the utter wreck, and failure of



all that unscrupulous ingenuity can devise for the attainment of unworthy desires, arises at the last, in the mere might of man's common instinct to be good, something which reconciles the fact of human sin to our faith in human nature, and seems to vindicate the hope of a distant but ultimate salvation,—is shadowed forth in the development and destiny of these two characters, with a masterly power and depth of insight which not unfrequently reminds us of Balzac.

Before we pass from the consideration of this work, we may remark, as regards the entire conception of it, that considerable skill is evinced in the mechanism by which Mr. Lever contrives to show that every rogue is limited, in his power to do mischief, to the use, as it were, of a single engine, and that he who assails honest men with one kind of weapon is liable to be himself overthrown by his ignorance of the fence peculiar to some other species of rascality. Thus, for instance, the amateur blackguard Annesley Beecher, is no match for the professional blackleg Grog Davis; and Grog Davis, in turn, with all his craft and audacity, is no match against the more astute tactics of Davenport Dunn, the refined and comprehensive rascal; whilst even Dunn is overreached at last by the combined common-sense of the honest portion of society; so that, with this species of vermin, as with all others, the rhyme holds good, that

“ Greater fleas have little fleas,  
Upon their legs to bite 'em;  
And little fleas have lesser fleas,  
And so *ad infinitum*.”

There are some admirable characters in Mr. Lever's last novel. Mrs. Penthony Morris is excellent. So, in another way, is Mr. Ogden, the bully of a public office, the sycophant of secretaries of state, and the tyrant of junior clerks, the pedant of Downing Street, and the bore of all society. There is nothing more delightful than to see a bully cowed; and the absolute terror and anguish of Ogden when he unexpectedly encounters, on the Continent, the fascinating wife from whom he has been divorced, the groan of positive pain into which his pompous compliment is suddenly converted by a single glance at the person for whom it was destined

with the most approved conventional gallantry, is inimitable. There is something even which claims our sympathy in the capacity for common human suffering thus revealed beneath all the small formalities of the man. Layton, the lost man of genius, is of a higher range, and there is considerable power, and not a little pathos, in Mr. Lever's vigorous sketch of this character. But, perhaps, the best-sustained character in the book is that of the Yankee, Leonidas Shaven Quakenboss.

In the delineation of this character Mr. Lever has evinced one merit, for which, perhaps, he can hardly hope to receive due appreciation from the majority of readers. Quakenboss is, so far as we know, almost the only Yankee of English manufacture in whose figures of speech the purely Yankee idiom, peculiar to the New England States, is not constantly confounded with the slang of the South and West. Mr. Lever is also deserving of approval for not having allowed the merely ludicrous in a subject so obviously open to coarse caricature, to overpower his finer perception of what are the better and worthier qualities of the Yankee character. In this respect, however, he has been anticipated by Sir E. Lytton.

There is certainly no lack of power in Mr. Lever's later novels. On the contrary, they contain writing of great power, and evince qualities which belong to a genius of a higher order than we discover in his earlier, and still, perhaps, more popular books. Had he never written anything but the 'Dodd Family,' that work alone would have entitled him to take undisputed rank among the humorists of England; and had that work been the first of a hitherto unknown writer, the sensation it would have excited must have been very great. But familiarity, if it does not breed contempt, often induces indifference. If Aristides had taken to rope-dancing, perhaps he would not have been ostracised by the Athenians. Popularity is an alms which, the more cheerfully it is accorded to a first appeal, the more churlishly is it conceded to a second from the same quarter. When we see a boy in the street standing on his head, if we are in a good humour we fling him a penny, but the next time we see him turning a somersault, we only say, "There's that boy again!" and button up our pockets. Still, there are undoubtedly

drawbacks to the claim of Mr. Lever's later works on general sympathy and approval for which he is himself responsible ; and we have reserved to the last the few remarks which we have to make of an unfavourable nature in reference to these works, because the cordial recognition which we have already expressed of their author's ability will be the best guarantee for our sincerity in objecting to the subjects on which that ability is sometimes exercised. There is a sameness of subject about the majority of Mr. Lever's younger novels which is partly counterbalanced by the fact that such sameness lies at least within the sphere of a more or less national interest, such as the portraiture of Irish life. But the continued repetition of scenes representative of a kind of society which is neither familiar nor pleasing to a large class of English readers, which is the characteristic of nearly all Mr. Lever's later works, is under any circumstances a mistake. The frivolity of Continental society, the vulgarity and mistakes of English travellers abroad, and the tricks and deceptions of sharpers and adventurers, is a very legitimate subject for satire ; but it has really been exhausted with great success in the 'Dodd Family,' and we regret to see it enter so largely into the staple material of Mr. Lever's subsequent novels. However excellent may be the cookery, and skilful the arrangement of the dishes, we object to continual invitations to dine off the leavings of any feast, however good ; it is not hospitality, but thrift, which would force us to drain the last flagon and swallow the last crumb.

" The funeral baked meats  
But coldly furnish forth the marriage-feast."

In such works as 'DAVENPORT DUNN,' and ONE OF THEM,' the genius of the author carries everything before it. But the subject of such a story as 'The Daltons' can, we should think, have little interest for the mass of the public. We need not defend these remarks from the imputation of a false and vulgar morality which would exclude from fiction its legitimate sources of interest in the delineation of crime and the analysis of evil. Nothing in human nature can be alien to art, which derives from nature all its materials. All we ask from an author is to preserve the balance and proportion

of the emotions to which he appeals. To be continually poring over the blots and failures of humanity, or the vices and corruption of any social state, is neither profitable nor pleasant. And the perusal of a series of fictions which present to us only the deformities of nature, and detain us without relief or intermission in the society of sharpers and vagabonds, and all manner of vicious or vulgar persons, becomes fatiguing and painful. As we close one after the other of such books, we feel like men returning from a hell. Our gains are not equivalent to the unpleasurable process of their acquirement, and we long for some more wholesome intercourse with mankind. The highest and most truthful art must occasionally hold intercourse with evil, but it is a mistake in art to make that intercourse habitual. When an author continually presents to our view one side only, either of society or of man's heart, and that the most unpleasant of all, he appears to imply—not that this is to be found in society or human nature, and is worth looking at—but that nothing else is to be found in society or human nature, and that this is worth looking at; and we revolt from acquiescence in any such view of a cause which is, after all, our own. Our estimation of the genius of Le Sage would be much lower if he had written half-a-dozen small 'Gil Blas; and if Fielding had written many 'Jonathan Wilds,' we should be disposed to think less highly of the mind that made 'Tom Jones.' We attribute this defect to what is, perhaps, in itself a conscientious quality. We think that Mr. Lever is apt to be content to draw his materials for fiction too exclusively from *observation*. Human nature is indeed inexhaustible, but no one man's observation of human nature can be so. The widest experience is limited, and the limit of it must be reached at last. There is only one inexhaustible source for fiction, and that is the Imagination.

But the imagination itself is an engine which cannot be kept in frequent operation without being frequently supplied with fuel. It cannot act without being first acted upon. And the fault we are inclined to attribute to the majority of our modern writers of romance is, that they give out too much and take in too little. Let men say what they will about native originality, man is not really a creator. He changes,

improves, and extends, that is all. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*; and the best new ideas are the product of a large accumulation of old ones. Those authors who rely chiefly upon personal observation and experience for the materials of fiction, cannot be too careful to vary their point of sight pretty often. Every imaginative writer must at some period have experienced the feelings expressed by Cowley, when he wrote—

“The fields which sprang beneath the ancient plough,  
Spent and outworn, return no harvest now,  
And we must die of want,  
Unless new lands we plant.”

If Mr. Lever is disposed to dispute the justice of these observations, or, at any rate, their special application to himself, he may certainly refer to the extraordinary sameness of a vast number of his contemporary novelists, who do not seem, on that account, to enjoy less popularity. One set of writers can talk of nothing but governesses, tutors, and athletic curates, who love fly-fishing and abhor Strauss. The domestic novel happens to be in fashion, and we certainly have enough of it. Others are never happy out of the precincts of Pall-Mall and the clubs, unless it be at a fashionable watering-place; and some can give no flavour to English fiction without importing it from Florence or Rome, or borrowing their intrigue from the secret societies, and their sentiment from Mazzinian manifestoes. But Mr. Lever is immeasurably richer in imagination and power than all such writers; and if he would occasionally emigrate to “fresh fields and pastures new,” he has already all that is needful in the way of stock and capital. He may be contented with his present reputation, which is extensive and likely to be permanent; but we believe that it is in his own power to elevate and enlarge it.

“Count no man happy till he has ceased to live,” says the Greek proverb. Sum up the attributes of no genius till it has ceased to act or to write. The last work of an author may sometimes be the first which gives a just idea of his mind as a whole.

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